

**OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S
FISCAL YEAR 2016 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT
PROGRAM: FISCAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND
THE NATIONAL INTEREST**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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**OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S
FY 2016 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM:
FISCAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS**

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2015

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND
THE NATIONAL INTEREST
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:07 p.m., in Room 226, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeff Sessions, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Sessions [presiding], Perdue, Grassley, Tillis, Durbin, Klobuchar, Franken, and Blumenthal.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF SESSIONS,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ALABAMA**

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you all for being with us. I am glad Senator Durbin can be with us. He is very knowledgeable in these areas.

We are having a vote going on now, so we were able to vote early and come on by, and sorry that we did not get to start right on time.

I would like everyone to be present to be able to watch the hearing without obstruction. If people stand up and block the views of those behind them or speak out of turn, it is not fair or considerate to others, and officers will remove those individuals from the room.

Before we begin with opening statements, I want to explain how we are going to proceed. We have one panel of witnesses today, Government witnesses. I will make an opening statement, followed by opening statements from Senators Schumer, Grassley, and Durbin. Each witness will have 5 minutes for an opening statement. Following their statements, we will begin the first round of questions, and if each Senator wishes to continue with questions, we will have a second round of questions. If there are no objections, I will start with my opening statement.

The hearing today will focus on the administration's proposed refugee settlement program for FY 2016. In particular, we will examine the economic and security implications of the administration's plan to boost significantly the admission of refugees to nearly 200,000 over 2 years, including a large increase in Syrian resettlement.

Too often, discussions of any one particular immigration program lack broader numerical context. Refugee admissions, asylees, and

parolees are all in addition to our huge annual intake of one million green card holders each year and the plus the 700,000 foreign workers and the 500,000 students that we have.

Before addressing the policy question of whether or not to admit additional groups of refugees, we should first consider the broader immigration circumstances that we have in our country.

This week marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Pew Research has done an exhaustive study on the Act, and here are some of their findings, as well as findings from the Census Bureau and the DHS, the Department of Homeland Security.

In the last five decades, 59 million immigrants have entered the United States. Immigration, including the children of post-1965 immigrants, has added 72 million to our population of 330 million. One-fifth of the world's immigrants live in the United States. No other country has taken in more than 1 in 20. We have taken in 6 times more immigrants than all of Latin America and 10 million more than the European Union, who has a more than 50 percent greater population. We have permanently resettled 1.5 million immigrants from Muslim countries in the United States since 9/11. In 1970, fewer than 1 in 20-21 million Americans were foreign born. Today it is approaching one in seven and will soon eclipse the highest levels ever recorded in the country.

Pew projects new immigrants and their children will add 103 million individuals. Six in ten decades of the 20th century witnessed immigration declines. Every decade of the 21st century will see rapidly rising immigration, with each decade setting new all-time records.

After four decades of large-scale immigration, Pew polls show that by a more than 3-to-1 margin, the public would like to see immigration reduced rather than increased. According to Rasmussen, only 7 percent of Americans support resettling 100,000 Middle Eastern refugees annually in the United States.

More recent studies from the Georgetown Professor Eric Gould and Harvard Professor George Borjas, both knowledgeable experts, have linked this huge increase in the foreign labor supply to the crippling wage stagnation and joblessness that is affecting many of our workers.

With that context in mind, we must consider what our economic, social, and security infrastructure can responsibly handle. Let us not also forget that we are presently dealing with our own hemisphere's immigration crisis. The situation in Syria and throughout the Middle East is a serious one, but it cannot be solved with emigrating large numbers of people from that region.

While the United States may have a role to play and does have a role to play, such as establishing safe zones in Syria as recommended by General Petraeus, it would be more appropriate to effectively support the refugees in locations closer to their homes with the long-term goal of being able to return them safely to their homes. That is why the Middle Eastern nations clearly must take a larger role and the lead, actually in resettling their region's refugees. It is not sound policy to respond to the myriad problems in the region by encouraging millions to abandon their home. Reset-

ting the region's refugees within the region is the course likeliest to produce good long-term reforms and stabilization.

It has also been reported that as many as 3 of 4 of those seeking entry into Europe are not refugees from Syria but economic migrants, many from many different countries. In a September 23d Washington Post article, this is what they reported quote: "There are well-dressed Iranians speaking Farsi who insist they are members of the persecuted Yazidis of Iraq. There are Indians who do not speak Arabic but say they are from Damascus. There are Pakistanis, Albanians, Egyptians, Kosovars, Somalis, and Tunisians from countries with plenty of poverty and violence, but no war. It should come as no surprise that many migrants seem to be pretending they are someone else. The prize, after all, is the possibility of benefits, residency, and work in Europe", close quote.

We will have that same problem here, and we do have that problem here. We must be cautious. The administration originally proposed a ceiling of 75,000 refugee admissions in the next fiscal year. Last week, the administration announced that it plans to accept at least a floor of 85,000 refugees next year and at least 100,000 the next year. Once here with refugee status, those individuals can claim any job and collect any Federal welfare benefit. Recent statistics from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement indicate that 75 percent of refugees receive food stamps and more than half receive free health care and cash benefits.

For refugees from the Middle East, the numbers are even higher. More than 90 percent of recent Middle Eastern refugees draw food stamps and about 70 percent receive free health care and cash welfare.

Refugee settlement also comes with security risks as we have witnessed with the surge of ISIS recruitment among, for example, Somali refugee communities in Minnesota. Anyone claiming to have a serious and honest discussion of refugee resettlement must ask the difficult questions about integration—how can we accomplish that?—assimilation and community safety. This is certainly true with respect to countries like Syria where we have little or no information about who the people are, no background information, no ability to determine whether they are radicalized now or might become radicalized after their arrival in the United States.

Indeed, the FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism has testified that the United States does not have quote, "the systems in place on the ground", end of quote in Syria to collect enough information to properly screen refugees. That is pretty obvious, frankly. Our Subcommittee is currently investigating the scores of examples of refugees and asylees who go on to commit acts of terror or become involved with terrorist organizations.

The economic and physical security of the American people must never be a secondary consideration. With workers' pay stagnant, our entitlement programs on the verge of insolvency, our law enforcement struggling to combat radicalization and increasing crime, and our schools and communities struggling to keep up, voters are rightly and justifiably wondering about their Government's priorities and how we should conduct our business. That is what we will explore today.

Senator Durbin, I am glad you can be with us. I know you are knowledgeable on these issues, and once again I would like to thank our witnesses who are involved with or lead the agencies that handle these difficult issues every day, and we look forward to their testimony. Senator Durbin.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD J. DURBIN,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

Senator DURBIN. Thank you very much, Chairman Sessions.

My mother was an immigrant from Lithuania. She was brought to America at the age of 2 with her brother and sister. My grandmother carried them off a boat in Baltimore and put them on a train to what they considered to be the Promised Land—East St. Louis, Illinois. My grandmother did not speak English very well, but she was determined to have a better life for her children and her family. She worked hard. Our whole family worked hard. As her son, I ended up with a full-time job.

When you reflect on my background, my family's story, it is not just mine. It is America's story. It is who we are. We are Nation of immigrants.

On the issue of refugees, there are two Members of the U.S. Senate who are the sons of refugees. One is running for President of the United States.

I want to put this in context when we talk about issues. We are talking about real lives and real people. Today we are talking about the worst humanitarian crisis of our time.

This refugee crisis has almost 60 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes around the world. Syria is the epicenter. When they ask me what I think of when you say the two words "Vietnam War," instantly my first impression is a photo image of a little girl, a victim of napalm, naked, running down a road toward the camera, crying, with her arms extended. What is my image of Syrian refugees? A 3-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the Mediterranean—Aylan Kurdi. I looked at that little corpse that had washed up on the shore and thought, "That is my grandson." That is the image I take from the Syrian refugee crisis.

More than half of Syria's 23 million people have been forced from their homes. More than 4 million Syrians are registered as refugees, including almost 2 million children. More than 10,000 Syrian children have been killed. Thousands are unaccompanied and separated from their parents. They are not economic migrants. They are refugees fleeing for their lives.

The poet Warsan Shire, who is herself a refugee from Somalia, put it well when she wrote, "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land."

The Syrian refugee crisis has placed a great strain on many countries. The tiny country of Lebanon, population 4.2 million, now hosts 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees, more refugees per capita than any country in the world. That is almost 30 percent of their population. Jordan, of course, going through the same type of strain.

Do we have any obligation in the United States to face this? I think we do. History tells us we should.

We have taken some positive steps to address this crisis. The United States is the most generous donor to the refugees of any Nation in the world. We are providing safe haven to hundreds of Syrian visitors in this country who were allowed to stay on a temporary basis when the war developed. After last year's hearing, I held a hearing on the Syrian refugee crisis. The administration issued exemptions so they could stay and not return to the danger of Syria. So far, the United States of America has accepted about 1,600 Syrian refugees. Sixteen hundred, a small number.

May I join with Senator Klobuchar and 13 other Senators asking the Administration to admit at least 65,000 by the end of 2016. The administration is now looking at 10,000. Why does it take so long? Because our vetting process is very careful. It takes from 14 to 24 months after the initial interview for a refugee to be accepted in the United States. This notion—and you will hear it on the campaign trail—that we just throw our doors open and say, “Come on board,” is not true at all. I have gone through a classified briefing, and the background checks that we impose on these people are very serious and very thorough, and they take a long, long time.

Germany has announced they are taking 800,000 Syrian refugees. Their average time for vetting? Four months. Ours? Eighteen to 24 months. We are careful. If we are going to show that we have a heart, we are also going to be thoughtful about it, too, and do everything humanly possible to avoid any dangerous person from ever coming to our country.

What is the lesson of refugees in the United States? There is a lesson from World War II, isn't there? Remember a ship called the “St. Louis.” It came to our shores with Jews from Europe. They said, “If you do not take us, we will go back to Europe and die.” We did not take them. They returned to the Holocaust.

After the war, we accepted many refugees, hundreds of thousands. In Vietnam, we think maybe some 400,000 ended up coming to the United States. Soviet Jews who were allowed to come to this country to avoid persecution, over 200,000. Let me add, when it came to Cuban refugees, the numbers now are about 650,000, including, as I mentioned earlier, the fathers of two of our colleagues in the U.S. Senate, one of who is running for President.

We resettled more than 150,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia, and the reason I want to raise that point is because there is something that must be said. We are talking about many Muslims who have come to the United States and become an important part of our country. In my condo building in Chicago, Illinois, there are two Bosnian Muslims who are the hardest-working people I know, so proud of their families and proud to be part of this country; and as we will find here from groups that sent us statements, including, in particular, a letter signed by 400 faith leaders expressing strong opposition to any effort to limit the resettlement of Muslim refugees.

Let me just close by saying on an economic basis it is true. Some of these refugees come here dirt poor and need a helping hand. I met four of those families just 2 weeks ago in Chicago. The statistics will also tell us that that changes very, very quickly. As soon as they can command enough of the English language, they are off and working, and working hard at some of the toughest jobs. Some

of them turn out to be pretty successful: the late General John Shalikashvili; Sergei Brin, the co-founder of Google; former Intel CEO Andrew Grove, the pioneer of the semiconductor industry; oh, and I did not mention Steve Jobs, the son of a Syrian immigrant. So, I would hope today that as we reflect on this issue, we reflect on history.

The last thing I will say is I would like to introduce the Members of this Subcommittee to Hassam Alustrum. Mr. Alustrum, are you here? Please stand. Thank you, sir. He fled his home in Homs, Syria, in 2013 after his house was shelled by a missile from the Syrian Army. He moved into another house with five other families, and that house was shelled and destroyed as well. He moved to another neighborhood, but barrel bombs were being dropped in that neighborhood. He then fled Syria with his wife, Suha, and two children. After a long and difficult journey through the desert, Mr. Alustrum ended up in Jordan where he applied for refugee status. After a long process, he and his family came to the United States on June 16th this year. He now works two jobs. He moves furniture during the day and he is a baker at night in order to support his family. Mr. Alustrum is not a terrorist, and he is not a fiscal drain on America. We should be proud that our country has welcomed Mr. Alustrum and his family. That is what our country's refugee settlement program is all about. I hope my colleagues in Congress will come to understand that as a result of this hearing.

Thank you, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you, Senator Durbin, and thank you for your guest that you introduced.

We are looking to establish a good, sound policy that fulfills the United States' responsibility in this regard and that does so in a smart and effective way. Senator Grassley, did you have an opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES E. GRASSLEY,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA**

Chairman GRASSLEY. I think because of time I will put my statement in the record. I do have a statement, and I am going to put it in the record.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Grassley appears as a submission for the record.]

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SESSIONS. Yes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. I am going to have to leave a little early for something I committed to, but I just wanted to put my statement in the record as well. I know that Senator Durbin mentioned the work that we have done to try to get more Syrian refugees into our country. We have been moving at a very slow pace. Just coming from a State that Senator Franken and I represent, which is the home of so many refugees, we are so proud of our Hmong population. We took in these Hmong people who fought on our side in the war in Vietnam, and now they are integrated in our community and thriving. We have very strong Liberian and Somali populations, and it is a major part of our State's fabric of life. I think people have to remember that when we talk about this issue because, as Senator Durbin said, 90 of our Fortune 500 companies

were formed by immigrants, 200 immigrants or kids of immigrants, 30 percent of our U.S. Nobel Laureates were born in other countries. I hope we think about that when we consider this refugee issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[The prepared statement of Senator Klobuchar appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman SESSIONS. All right. If the panel would stand, raise your right hand, and take the oath. Do you affirm that the testimony you are about to give before this Committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. BARTLETT. I do.

Ms. STRACK. I do.

Mr. EMRICH. I do.

Mr. CAREY. I do.

[Witnesses are sworn in.]

Chairman SESSIONS. Please be seated.

I will briefly introduce our witnesses. For reference, their full biographies are available on the Committee's website.

First, we have Larry Bartlett, Director of Admissions for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State. Mr. Bartlett is the Director of the Refugee Admissions Office of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. He previously served in various State Department leadership positions and served in a variety of capacities with the Peace Corps.

Next, we have Ms. Barbara Strack, Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. She joined the USCIS as Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division in 2005. Ms. Strack previously held positions with the National Immigration Forum, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, as counsel to a U.S. Senate Subcommittee, and in private practice of law in Washington, DC, at O'Melveny & Myers. She is with the Department of Homeland Security.

Next, we have Mr. Matthew Emrich, Acting Associate Director of the Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, also with Homeland Security. Before he was selected as Acting Associate Director, he served as a Deputy Associate Director of FDNS and has over 21 years of immigration, law enforcement, and intelligence experience. Before his civilian Government employment, Mr. Emrich served for 8 years on active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps in the counterintelligence and infantry fields. He also has worked in Baghdad as a deployed senior human intelligence analyst for the Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Finally, we have Mr. Bob Carey, Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Mr. Carey most recently served as vice president of resettlement and migration policy at the International Rescue Committee, leading the agency's advocacy on refugee, immigration, and anti-trafficking, and community development policy issues. He also served as chair of the Refugee Council USA.

This is a good panel with much experience in lead key agencies that are critical to how we handle the refugee program. Mr. Bartlett, if you would, give us your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF LAWRENCE BARTLETT, DIRECTOR,
OFFICE OF REFUGEE ADMISSIONS, BUREAU OF
POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Chair, distinguished Senators, thank you for holding this briefing and bringing attention to the importance of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before you with my colleagues from the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and to update you on the measures we have taken to protect refugees around the world and provide new homes to some of the most vulnerable.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' latest statistics, there are nearly 20 million refugees in the world. The vast majority of these refugees will receive support in the country to which they fled until they can voluntarily and safely return home. The United States contributes to the programs of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, and other international and nongovernmental organizations that provide protection and assistance to refugees until they can return home.

In 2014, some 126,000 refugees voluntarily repatriated to their country of origin. That is the lowest recorded number since 1983. A small number of refugees may be allowed to become citizens in the country to which they fled, and an even smaller number—primarily those who are the most vulnerable—will be resettled in a third country. While UNHCR reports that less than 1 percent of all refugees are eventually resettled in third countries, the United States welcomes over half of these refugees.

Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over 3 million refugees from all over the world. The United States Refugee Admissions Program reflects the United States' highest values and aspirations of compassion, generosity, and leadership. Resettlement opportunities are focused on refugees who have immediate needs for durable and lasting solutions.

While maintaining our leadership role in humanitarian protection, an integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who are eligible for such protection and who are not known to present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, our program is committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States, and applicants to our program are subject to more intensive security than any other type of traveler to the U.S. to protect against threats to our national security. The Department of State collaborates with the Department of Homeland Security on this and also collaborates closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to protect the health of U.S.-bound refugees and the U.S. public.

For the past 3 fiscal years, the program has met its target for refugee arrivals, an unprecedented achievement in the program's history. In 2016, the program will grow to serve 85,000 refugees, at least 10,000 of whom will be Syrians, in order to respond to the increased needs in the Middle East.

The program enjoys substantial support from State and local governments as well as community members. The program resettles refugees to 48 States, 173 cities, and 304 sites. As a public-private partnership, it requires the support of American nongovernmental organizations, charities, faith-based groups, and thousands of volunteers and supporters of the program in hundreds of communities across the country. Recently, the Department of State has received an outpouring of interest from individuals, churches, and community organizations wishing to help with Syrian refugee resettlement.

With the continued support of Congress and the American people, refugee resettlement will remain a proud tradition for many years to come. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bartlett appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you very much. Ms. Strack.

**STATEMENT OF BARBARA L. STRACK, CHIEF,
REFUGEE AFFAIRS DIVISION, REFUGEE, ASYLUM,
AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE,
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND
SECURITY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. STRACK. Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Durbin, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Next month will mark the 10th anniversary of the Refugee Corps, a cadre of specially trained officers at USCIS who are dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status overseas. I have been honored to serve as the Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division over these 10 years and to work with this talented staff who are equally committed to the humanitarian mission of offering resettlement opportunities to refugees while safeguarding the integrity of our program and our national security.

This program has consistently benefited from the support of colleagues throughout USCIS and DHS as a whole, including USCIS' Asylum Corps, international staff, and Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate. As reflected by this panel today, we also work closely across departments.

The Refugee Resettlement Program has forged strong and deep relationships with colleagues in the law enforcement, national security, and intelligence communities, and we continue to benefit enormously from their expertise, analysis, and collaboration. It simply would not be possible to support a resettlement program of the size and scope that the U.S. maintains today without this critical interagency infrastructure.

As you know, the United States has a proud and long tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity to refugees from around the world who live in fear of persecution and are often left to languish in difficult conditions of temporary asylum. USCIS remains dedicated to fulfilling this mission as an integral part of this is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go to those who are eligible for such protection and who do not present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, we are com-

mitted to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle, and we continue to employ the highest security measures to protect against risks to our national security.

My written testimony describes in detail the screening measures and safeguards that have been developed by the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and enhanced over time. While many of these enhancements were first deployed in connection with the Iraqi Refugee Resettlement Program, they are now being applied more broadly to applicants of all nationalities, including Syrians, who represent a growing portion of our caseload. This entails biographic and biometric security checks, and a refugee applicant is not approved for travel until the results of all required security checks have been obtained and cleared.

In addition to security checks, USCIS conducts individual in-person interviews with applicants to determine their eligibility for refugee status. Recognizing that well-trained officers play a critical role in protecting the integrity of the refugee process, we place great emphasis on providing the highest-quality training to our adjudicators. This involves detailed training on specific refugee populations, including special training on the Iraqi and Syrian caseloads, in which outside experts from the intelligence, policy, and academic communities participate. In every instance, officers assess the credibility of applicants and evaluate whether the applicant's testimony is consistent with known country conditions.

Given the wide geographic scope of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, including remote and sometimes difficult locations, USCIS coordinates closely with PRM to schedule refugee interviews every quarter of the fiscal year. In a typical quarter, USCIS will deploy over 100 staff in up to 16 or 17 different locations. As a result of these carefully coordinated operations, as you have heard from Mr. Bartlett, we have succeeded in meeting the refugee admissions ceiling of 70,000 for a third year in a row.

Looking forward to FY 2016, USCIS is prepared to work closely with the State Department and other interagency partners to support a Refugee Admissions Program of 85,000, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees. We will continue to look for opportunity to improve and streamline our operations while maintaining the integrity of the program and our national security.

When I meet with new officers joining the Refugee Corps, I talk with them about the United States' longstanding tradition of offering protection to those fleeing persecution. I look at our work as being the stewards of this tradition for this time and this generation. We are committed to meeting this responsibility and preserving this American hallmark.

In closing, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Strack appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you, Ms. Strack. Mr. Emrich.

**STATEMENT OF MATTHEW D. EMRICH, ACTING
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, FRAUD DETECTION AND
NATIONAL SECURITY DIRECTORATE, U.S. CITIZENSHIP
AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF HOMELAND SECURITY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. EMRICH. Thank you, Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Durbin, and other distinguished Senators, for the opportunity to update you on the measures we are taking to ensure the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

In addition to the security checks that my colleagues Mr. Bartlett and Ms. Strack have described and that are in our written testimony that apply to all refugees regardless of nationality, USCIS has begun an additional layer of enhanced review of Syrian refugee applicants. This enhanced review is performed by headquarters-based staff from the USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, or FDNS.

I would like to take a moment to describe the role of FDNS. Also within the DC-based element of the Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate is the Intelligence Division, which is in close and regular contact with our DHS Intelligence Community partner, the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis, other DHS components, and Intelligence Community member agencies.

FDNS also has full-time liaison officers stationed at the FBI headquarters National Joint Terrorism Task Force, Interpol, and the FBI Terrorist Screening Center. We rely on these everyday connections to share information with our law enforcement and intelligence partners at the headquarters level, both proactively and when asked, and these connections also reinforce the established information-sharing agreements that exist within the security check rubric.

Before refugee applicants are scheduled for interview by a USCIS refugee officer in the field, Syrian cases are reviewed at CIS headquarters by a Refugee Affairs Division officer. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred to the FDNS headquarters-based staff that I mentioned earlier for additional research and review. FDNS intelligence analysts conduct open-source and classified research on referred cases and synthesize an assessment for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity, and it is used by the interviewing officer to inform lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Throughout this review process of Syrian refugee applicants, FDNS engages with law enforcement and Intelligence Community members to obtain additional clarifying information, to assist in identity verification, or to deconflict to ensure USCIS activities will not adversely affect ongoing law enforcement investigations. When FDNS identifies terrorism-related information, it nominates an individual or individuals to the terrorism watchlist using standard interagency protocols or provides additional information to our existing records. Additionally, FDNS intelligence analysts draft reports that alert U.S. law enforcement agencies and the Intelligence Community of information that meets standing intelligence requirements.

We work very closely with the DHS Office of Intelligence Analysis and our many law enforcement and Intelligence Community partners to identify options for new potential screening opportunities to enhance the existing process. We are doing this constantly.

In addition to the checks that I have described, refugee applicants who travel to the United States are screened at the port of entry, as is the case with all individuals who travel to the United States. The screening at the port of entry is conducted by Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration.

The humanitarian crisis in the Middle East is severe, and my staff and I are reminded on almost a daily basis of the strife and atrocities that have been occurring in this area—that have been occurring for some time and that are occurring now. We are always committed to maintaining and always seeking to enhance a thorough screening effort in close coordination with our partners so that we may maintain the integrity of the program and our national security.

I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Emrich appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman SESSION. Thank you. Mr. Carey.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT CAREY, DIRECTOR, OFFICE
OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. CAREY. Chairman Sessions and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the Department of Health and Human Services' responsibilities in facilitating the resettlement of refugees in the United States. In my testimony today, I will describe the role that HHS plays in the Refugee Resettlement Program.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the Office of Refugee Resettlement within HHS and outlined the United States' commitment to humanitarian relief through the resettlement of persons fleeing persecution on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion.

Since the passage of the Act, over 3 million refugees from more than 70 countries have been provided safe haven in the United States, along with the possibility of a new beginning and freedom from persecution and displacement.

The Departments of Homeland Security, State, and HHS work together to advance America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

In FY 2014, nearly 140,000 individuals were eligible for resettlement services through ORR programs. These programs assist refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, victims of torture, foreign-born victims of human trafficking, and special immigrant visa holders to become employed and self-sufficient as soon as possible after their arrival.

ORR carries out its mission to serve refugees through grants and services, administered by State governments and nonprofit organizations and an extensive public-private partnership network. ORR grants are designed to facilitate refugees' successful transition and

integration into life in the United States. Refugees arrive with distinct skills and experiences, and we strive to provide the benefits and services necessary to leverage those assets and talents.

ORR funds support—transitional, time-limited support for medical services for individuals not eligible for other public benefits. Through programs administered by States and nonprofit organizations, ORR provides cash and medical assistance to eligible populations for up to 8 months after their arrival in the U.S. In addition, ORR funds foster care programs for unaccompanied refugee minors, certain minors granted special immigrant juvenile status, and unaccompanied minor victims of a severe form of human trafficking.

ORR provides funds to State governments and private nonprofit agencies to support social services, including English language instruction, employment services, case management, social adjustment services, and interpreter services. These funds are allocated to States based on a formula tied to the prior 2 years of arrival data which accounts for refugees' and other entrants' movements to other States after their initial resettlement as well.

ORR programs also support economic development activities. These focus on financial literacy, establishing credit, and matched savings in support of business starts, educational goals, car purchases essential to employment, and business startups that in turn employ thousands of individuals.

A portion of new entrants participate in the voluntary agency Matching Grant Program rather than the Refugee Cash Assistance Program. Through this program, voluntary resettlement agencies provide services to help refugees become employed and self-sufficient within their first 4 months in the U.S. In FY 2014, the program served 30,000 individuals and reported economic self-sufficiency rates of 76 percent for refugees at 180 days after arrival. Given the proven success of the program, the President's budget proposed a \$22 million increase to the 2016 Matching Grant Program to serve an additional 10,000 individuals.

Finally, I would like to share with you the story of one refugee. Rikan, 28, and his family were forced to flee their homeland in northern Iraq when the U.S. military began its withdrawal due to family members' employment with American forces and related threats to their lives. Starting over was a challenge for Rikan, as it is for all refugees. He applied for more than 100 jobs during his first 7 months in St. Louis while attending English language classes. His first job in the U.S. was working at a local grocery store. Three years later, he has opened a car dealership. His mission is to provide fellow immigrants with affordable and reliable used cars. The business has been open for 2 years. He employs a number of other individuals, and he now is helping other refugees and individuals from communities to buy their first cars. His determination to succeed is representative of the determination I see in so many of the refugees who arrive in our country. Despite unimaginable hardships, violence, and oppression, they arrive seeking opportunity, not handouts, an opportunity to give back to their communities, achieve the American dream. HHS' programs assist refugees and other vulnerable populations to do just that.

I welcome your interest in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program at HHS. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Carey appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Carey. You mentioned refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian special programs that are also akin to refugees, and that totals 140,000 that you have responsibility for?

Mr. CAREY. Yes, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. That includes 85,000 refugees?

Mr. CAREY. These numbers are from 2014. In the current year, they include responsibility for 70,000 refugees.

Chairman SESSIONS. About an equal number more than that. You also mentioned self-sufficiency. You define self-sufficiency to include Government assistance reports, do you not?

Mr. CAREY. The Matching Grant self-sufficiency rates include individuals who are employed in full-time employment at 180 days after arrival.

Chairman SESSIONS. They still may be eligible for food stamps, Medicaid, and other assistance programs. Isn't that correct?

Mr. CAREY. Refugees are admitted as legal permanent residents, and they are eligible for any benefits—or they adjust to legal permanent resident status after one year. During their time of assistance, they are eligible as other individuals would be during their first 8 months in the United States.

Chairman SESSIONS. I am just trying to clarify this because I think we all need to fully understand it. As I understand it, from 2008 through 2013, refugees from the Middle East, for example, 91 percent are eligible and receive SNAP, food stamp benefits, and high percentages receive cash benefits, TANF, housing benefits, and Medicaid. Is that correct?

Mr. CAREY. I believe—

Chairman SESSIONS. Do you deny those statistics? They are Government statistics.

Mr. CAREY. Those figures include refugees who are receiving benefits during their initial resettlement period as provided through ORR and States and local governments.

Chairman SESSIONS. My understanding is that through that 5-year period, which is a long period, you had a very high subsidy rate, and I just think we should know that, because when they come in, you provide assistance to help them get established, but they are immediately then eligible for the same aid programs that we provide American citizens, and that most of them will be starting at lower incomes and become eligible for health care and other benefits.

Mr. Bartlett, in general, you know, it is important for us—I tried to ask my staff to make sure how does this thing really work. Maybe you would be the one to ask. Refugees typically go, I understand, about 90 percent to the United Nations, who then give them some sort of number and send them, at least some of them, to the United States nine resettlement offices around the globe. Is that right?

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Chairman, let me explain. First of all, UNHCR, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, is our largest partner overseas. We provide substantial funding to that agency, and I think as you and others have mentioned, it is important that we assist refugees overseas. It is not just about bringing them here. It is about helping them, and helping them to have an opportunity to go home should that occasion present itself. We do work heavily through UNHCR. They have offices in all refugee-hosting countries around the world, and so they are our primary partner.

If I could, one of the things I would like to say in response to helping people overseas, the U.S. Government has provided \$4.5 billion since the beginning of the Syria crisis to do just that, to help refugees, number one, survive—

Chairman SESSIONS. Does some of that count the U.N. money?

Mr. BARTLETT. Absolutely.

Chairman SESSIONS. In addition to the UN—

Mr. BARTLETT. No, it goes primarily to the United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Organization for Migration, and then a host of NGO's that are operational. We work through those partners because they are the ones who actually know how to do the jobs.

Chairman SESSIONS. We are the largest contributor to that program?

Mr. BARTLETT. That is correct. It is with the intent that people, number one, want to go home, which they do, and that they will be able to do so. There does come a point in time where the strain on the hosting countries—Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, obviously the big 3—becomes immense, and we want to do our partner also through resettlement.

At that point in time, the UNHCR, because they have field-level people working in camps or working in urban areas where they have NGO's who are doing that, identifies specific people, specific families who they consider most vulnerable. So, we are looking—

Chairman SESSIONS. I was just trying to get an overview of it.

Mr. BARTLETT. Okay.

Chairman SESSIONS. The U.N. would send it to your people. You would then evaluate them or at least take information from them. Then it goes to Homeland Security, who does background checks and personal interviews. Is that correct?

Ms. STRACK. Yes, sir, that is correct.

Chairman SESSIONS. My time is almost up. I do not want to keep my colleagues waiting, but that is basically right. Then there are checked indices which are virtually nonexistent. Mr. Emrich, I know you have got a good plan there, but there is no place to check. There is not anybody, as we will establish later. Then if they are approved, airfare is provided to the United States.

Mr. BARTLETT. Sir, if I could just say, not only do they have to go through security checks but also through medical exams, and we do that in part for the health of the refugee but also the health of the United States to make sure we are not importing contagious diseases. The airfare, frankly, is provided as a loan to the refugee, and the refugee, once they arrive, signs a promissory note to pay back the loan. Over the course of about 10 years, we have an 80

percent repayment rate, and that money goes back into future refugee programs.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you. Colleagues, we will go to the next questions. Mr. Carey, we do not want to—we just need to be aware that when we talk about the cost of the program—and we have a \$1 billion cost, colleagues, we are not talking about the new stress on Medicaid, food stamps, schools, hospitals, the housing allowances that they may be entitled to, and other costs of that kind. That has not been provided. Isn't that correct? You are not estimating that, Mr. Carey?

Mr. CAREY. ORR's budget for assistance to refugees during FY 2015 is \$585 million. After 1 year, refugees adjust to permanent resident status, and they are then eligible for services on a means-tested basis in the communities in which they are resettled.

Chairman SESSIONS. Actually, they are eligible for those immediately, are they not? Or do they have to wait a year before they become eligible for food stamps or Medicaid?

Mr. CAREY. They are eligible for services for 8 months under the ORR program, and then they are eligible as any other resident, legal resident, would be.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you. Senator Tillis.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for holding this important meeting. Thank you all for being here, and thank you for your service, past and present.

I want to go back to trying to understand whether or not we have the resources and the coordination that is necessary to do this safely. Before I do, I cannot help but point out that a lot of this crisis is created, if we talk about the Syrian situation—but we are talking about far beyond that; this is 10,000 Syrian refugees. In the case of Syria, it is because we have a despotic regime in the way of Bashar al-Assad, and I think a policy there that has finally led the Syrian people to believe they simply cannot live with any sense of comfort and safety in this country. It is a humanitarian disaster that is already playing out in the hundreds of thousands. If you go to Jordan and see the second largest city there now, it is a refugee camp with a number of Syrians in it. If you take a look at what the EU is doing, this is a crisis, and I think in some part it is a crisis because of failed policies that the United States has in the region trying to stabilize it.

Secretary Kerry said that we were going to increase the number of refugees from 70,000 in FY 2015 to 75,000. Then a couple of weeks later, he said that that number may be 85,000—it could go as high as 100,000—and that he was more or less setting a floor of 10,000 for the Syrians in particular. We know that this discussion is about a larger number, somewhere between, let us say, 85,000 and 100,000. I am trying to get the math to work.

I do not think any of you have been told that your resources are being increased proportionate to the number of refugees that you are going to have to work on, whether it is the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, or the Department of Health and Human Services.

At the most fundamental level, I am trying to figure out how you absorb this within the current rate of funding that you have without something giving, and one of those things that may give could

be the very important thing that we all have an obligation to ensure, and that is the safety and security of the homeland. There is a lot of vetting that has to occur. There is going to be handoff between the various agencies. How do we make sure with this increased workload and increased pressure to help the refugees that we do not make a mistake that could potentially put our homeland at risk? I will start with anyone in the agency glad to go first, maybe Homeland Security.

Mr. BARTLETT. I was going to start with the numbers, because that is perhaps the easier part of the question, and then we will go to the security vetting. Just to be clear, yes, we—our goal, our target, our ceiling, whichever you want to call it, for this fiscal year, the one we just started, is 85,000. Within that 85,000, we are striving to admit 10,000 Syrians. That is not a cap.

Senator TILLIS. Mr. Bartlett, the only clarification I have is that Secretary Kerry said that it is a ceiling—it is not a ceiling; it is a floor. That suggests to me language that could anticipate more over time.

Mr. BARTLETT. The President signed a determination earlier this week for 85,000. I think if that were to be raised, that would again need to be re-signed at a higher number. Then the 100,000 refers to the aspiration, the goal to do 100,000 refugees in FY 2017.

I would say on the State Department side, in terms of resources, we know that it will take more to bring in 85,000 refugees. We are looking across our programs to see where we can gain efficiencies. I can assure you on our side there will be no shortcuts on security; there will be no shortcuts on medical screening; there will be no shortcuts on processing. We will be having discussions about budgetary needs in the future, but at the moment in time, there will be no shortcuts in terms of our responsibilities to the American people.

Senator TILLIS. Ms. Strack.

Ms. STRACK. Thank you. At a planning level, we had anticipated that the refugee ceiling for FY 2016 was likely going to rise to 75,000. As an operational person and for planning purposes, I had anticipated an increase from 70,000 to 75,000.

You are probably aware we at USCIS are in an unusual situation in that we are fee-funded agency. The money that supports my program, the resources that support my program, are paid by applicants for other immigration benefits. Everyone who applies for a green card or applies for naturalization, a piece of that fee supports the refugee and asylum programs at USCIS.

Having spoken to our Office of Chief Financial Officer, he has informed us that there is sufficient funding in what is called our “examination fee account” to cover the 85,000 anticipated admissions in FY 2016 by reprioritizing between programs. I would like to reiterate, as Mr. Bartlett said, in no way are we cutting any corners or are we changing the security checks or cutting back on the elements that we think are integral to the integrity of the program.

Mr. EMRICH. I would just like to echo what Mr. Bartlett and Ms. Strack have said regarding the security checks. We will not cut corners. The security check requirements were developed in the interagency with the consultation and expertise of the FBI, our DHS partners, and the Intelligence Community partners, and the secu-

rity regime was set up with all that input, and I have heard no discussion of making any cuts to it for any reason.

I would like to point out that the grants of refugee status are discretionary so that if there is a doubt, the case is referred for further review. If there is a national security concern, that individual's application is denied.

Mr. CAREY. As the refugee situation continues to evolve, the administration is assessing ORR's capacity and resource needs for FY 2016. With an increased number of refugees, it will be important to preserve currently available resources and fund this account at a sufficient level.

Senator TILLIS. Mr. Chair, if I may just ask one question related to accountability. Mr. Bartlett, I understand that you are working with the decisions that have been made, but it does seem to me that if we went from 75,000 to 85,000 over a couple of weeks, given the growing crisis, a serious crisis where people's lives are at stake, that it is going to go up again, we cannot only answer this question in the context of the current commitment we have made but the likely commitment we will make going forward. I share some of the Chair's concerns about the ongoing costs, but more than anything else, before this Committee, I have had to have the sad discussion about an immigration decision that led to a young man that murdered people in my city of Charlotte because the handoff was not done properly. It was someone who was granted deferred status. It is not specific to this, but it speaks to the various agencies working together using the data effectively. In this case, it resulted in the deaths of people in my home city just 20 minutes from where I live.

I would like to know that as you move forward and you all have individual pieces, you are passing the baton in many cases, who ultimately owns the responsibility as we go through and process 85,000 or 100,000 or 120,000? What agency or who ultimately owns the responsibility if we have to come back and there is a lapse?

Mr. Chair, that is my final question. Thank you for your indulgence.

Ms. STRACK. The responsibility for actually adjudicating a refugee petition, it is one of our forms, the Form I-590, that responsibility falls to USCIS. We approve that. We would not approve it if we have derogatory information on that application, and as Mr. Emrich mentioned, we also have discretion so we can deny a case when we feel that is appropriate, even if there is not a derogatory security check but there is other information that we think makes that individual not a good candidate to come to the United States.

There is another check. When the applicant arrives at the airport, our colleagues at Custom and Border Protection, the inspectors at the airport can also make a decision at that point whether to admit based on the fact that the applicant already has an approved refugee status.

Mr. BARTLETT. Senator, if I could just say one thing about the build from 75,000 to 85,000, this program is certainly not linear. We have been planning for 75,000; now we are planning for 85,000. We will be building the program throughout the year so that arrivals will be peaking toward the end of the fiscal year, not at the beginning. We will have an opportunity to review how we do this to

make it more efficient and as effective or perhaps more effective than it is now.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you, Senator.

You make a very valid point. I do not see—and if we go to 100,000, that is going to—the next year, as proposed, and Senator Kerry, Secretary Kerry, our former colleague, told us in consultation with the Judiciary Committee last week that it would be substantially increased over the 85,000, he thought. He frankly told us that.

This is not the bottom numbers, and the problems we are facing from security is here now. This is not just scare tactics. I am reading a Minneapolis paper interviewing a coach with a lot of kids playing ball. The coach is Ahmed Ismail. He says quote, “There are monsters out there”, end of quote. It goes on to say, “More than 20 young men left this Somali immigrant community from 2007 to 2009 to join al-Shabaab, Arabic for ‘The Youth,’ an al-Qaeda affiliate operating in the war-torn land their parents fled. In the past year, disappearances began again, this time to the Islamic State terrorists fighting in Iraq and Syria.”

I am just saying we need to be—we know this is serious. Mr. Emrich and Ms. Strack, you do not have the ability to do efficient checks on these, as we will talk about later.

Senator Perdue, thank you for being with us, and thank you for giving me this moment to make that point.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I will be brief. I really appreciate you calling this hearing. I know that Congress has a responsibility, and the President does as well, that we review this every year. Yet, I was chagrined to learn that we have not done it since 1979, so thank you for doing this. I thank the witnesses for being here today.

I just have a couple quick questions. Mr. Emrich, we have a perfect case study here in Iraq where there were systemic problems in the screening of Iraqi refugee applicants here. At a recent hearing, the FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach told House Homeland Security, and I am quoting this, the administration has quote, “learned its lesson,” unquote, since the problems it had with the Iraqi refugee admissions effort. Can you tell us what specific measures in your agency have been taken to remedy the problems? What do we learn from that exercise that we can apply here?

Mr. EMRICH. Absolutely. Let me just briefly describe the nature of the checks we do now and how they have changed. The checks are multilayered. They involve both biographic information and not just one data element but multiple biographic data elements and fingerprints, so biometric data.

The checks are done not just at one time. They are done over a period of time, and in some cases continuously throughout the process.

They touch against a broad range of U.S. Government holdings, so our biometric check, our fingerprint check checks against FBI fingerprint holdings. It checks against DOD fingerprint holdings, which include fingerprints that have been obtained overseas. It also checks against the DHS fingerprint system, which contains records of any time someone has passed through a U.S. border, their fingerprints are captured, and they go into the DHS system.

Senator PERDUE. Can I interrupt you? I am sorry to do this because I want to hear the rest of this. In Iraq, we also had background checks and actually talked to people on the ground in Iraq when we had a lot of troops on the ground and a lot of people in Iraq. We do not have that in Syria. Is that not going to create a tremendous shortfall in data in addition to the technical checks you are talking about?

Mr. EMRICH. We have added a specific interagency check since the time that we were in Iraq, and we can brief you on that in detail in another setting. Another additional thing that we have done for this population is the enhanced review that I described. The individual comes in contact first—the refugee applicant comes in contact with UNHCR. He provides a story, and at that time all of his family members and the applicant—I am saying “he.” It could be a “she.” The principal applicant is registered as do the family members. Then that interview—that individual is interviewed again at the RSC. By the time our folks are reviewing the application, they have already been talked to twice. They have had a very good incentive to provide accurate information to the UNHCR because that is how—at that registration, that is how they get food rations and housing for the most part.

I do not want to discount the importance of the interview here because this is the face-to-face encounter where the refugee officers have been specially trained in the country and country conditions. They know what questions to ask an individual who is leaving Syria. They know what questions to ask about military service, what questions to ask about possible bars. If there are national security concerns there, we look at the consistency of all those encounters, and that gives us an opportunity to ask additional questions. We have individuals with a lot of expertise who can inform questions there.

Senator PERDUE. Okay. Thank you. I need to go on to this last question. If there is any other major point you want to make on that? Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Bartlett, I apologize. I am about out of time, but I just want to get back to one thing, and that is, the definition of a refugee. If someone leaves Syria—and, look, we know there is a major humanitarian crisis there. We know that. We have been talking in the Senate about the causes of that. What I would like to do now is if someone leaves Syria and they go to Turkey and they live there a year and all of a sudden they do not like where they are in Turkey and they apply to the U.S., are they by definition considered a refugee, a Syrian refugee, for U.S. consideration in our process?

Mr. BARTLETT. I think I have to defer to DHS, because they make the final determination.

Ms. STRACK. The definition of a refugee is contained in the Refugee Convention—

Senator PERDUE. I understand.

Ms. STRACK [continuing]. And U.S. law very closely tracks that. Basically looking at whether a person has a separate past persecution or has a well-founded fear of prosecution on account of one of the protected grounds, which is race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. However,

there is a bar under U.S. law to resettlement if an individual has been firmly resettled in another country. There is quite a bit of law around what it means to be firmly resettled. If you are living in precarious circumstances, if you are not able to work, if your children cannot go to school, you know, if you are in a tenuous circumstance, that does not amount to firm resettlement even if you have been in a country for a long period of time. It is a fact-specific circumstance. A short way of thinking about it is if you have the set of sort of rights that were similar to what a green card holder would have in the United States, that you can live and work indefinitely, that starts looking like firm resettlement. We would investigate that on an individual basis and look at what the laws are in the country of first asylum.

Senator PERDUE. One last quick question, and I apologize, Mr. Chairman. Of all the refugee applications, how many are accepted versus rejected would you say in a given year, a percentage?

Ms. STRACK. Worldwide, our average approval rate is about 80 percent. Right now it is higher than that for Syrian applicants, but it is likely to come down. Right now it is running a little over 90 percent for Syrian applicants. That percentage is based on all the cases that have been decided yes and no. What it leaves out is cases that are still under review or still on hold. We think a number of those hold cases, when they are finally decided, are going to turn into denials. When we have a little more experience with the caseload, we expect that the rate will come down somewhat.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you. This is very important. I read in my opening statement what the Europeans were finding, where you had the nice-dressed Iranian speaking Farsi saying he is from Iraq, Indians who do not speak Arabic but say they are from Damascus, Pakistanis, Albanians, Egyptians, Kosovars, Somalis, Tunisians who apparently are trying to get in as Syrian refugees. We are now approving 90 percent of those who apply.

Here in the Washington Post article also, it goes on to say—it had one story, there are “shady characters” in the group, too, “admitted criminals, Islamic State sympathizers and a couple of guys from Fallujah”—Iraq—“one with a fresh bullet wound, who when asked his occupation seemed confused.” “‘Army,’ said one. His friend corrected him. ‘We are all drivers.’”

“The refugees report that a forged Syrian passport can be bought on the Turkish border for as little as \$200. A reporter from the Daily Mail bought a Syrian passport, ID card, and driver’s license for \$2,000 in Turkey under the name of a real man who was killed in the conflict.”

You face, Ms. Strack, a difficult problem. Mr. Polinkus, the former head of the Association of CIS Officers, has told us that the agency has become a rubber stamp, that there is no way they have the ability to do what is asked of them.

Mr. Emrich, I know you say you have not changed any of your procedures, but the procedures just are not going to do the job, and let us talk about that, honestly about it. The Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Clapper, recently stated, “We do not put it past

the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among these refugees.' He further stated, 'It is a huge concern of ours.'"

Do you think that he is correct, Ms. Strack. Do you disagree with that?

Ms. STRACK. I guess I would like to talk to you about what our process is. I guess—

Chairman SESSIONS. No, I am just asking, are you concerned? He said, "We do not put it past . . . ISIL to infiltrate operatives in those refugees. . . . It is a huge concern for us."

You and Mr. Emrich are supposed to be evaluating these people. Is it a concern for you? Do you think that is a danger?

Ms. STRACK. Yes, sir, that is a concern for us, and I think that is what informs—that is the background that is the relationship we have with the Intel Community, so they share information with us about what they see as risks, and what we have been describing to you is the methods and the procedures that we have to try to mitigate those risks.

Could I just speak briefly to the document issue?

Chairman SESSIONS. Okay.

Ms. STRACK. I know Larry wanted to discuss this as well. We think there is a difference between—we are not working in Europe. We are not resettling refugee applications out of Europe. We are working primarily in Jordan and Turkey. I think the incentives for other nationalities, for non-Syrians, is different in those countries of first asylum, as a first piece.

The second piece is I did want to say we do not rely on any single document. In general, worldwide we see quite a difference between refugee populations, some of which are very highly documented, and some of which, because of the nature of their refugee experience, do not have a lot of documents.

We think documents are informative. We look at them. No single document is taken as a gold ticket for refugee approval.

Chairman SESSIONS. I am sure that is true. We also are told there are—European officials stated not long ago that a million are in North Africa waiting to cross the Mediterranean. There are a lot of people that would like to become a refugee to the United States or Europe, and you have to sort through them. What if they do not have any documents? A lot of people do not have any documents. What do you refer to then?

Ms. STRACK. In general, again, as I mentioned, we have found with Syrian refugees—and I would say the same thing is true with Iraqi refugees. In general, they have many, many documents. What we do is it is the process that I think Mr. Emrich described, and it is also our training. We involve the law enforcement community, the Intelligence Community. We invite them in to train our refugee officers and to talk to them about country conditions information. If someone does not have documents, for example, they might tell us, "My documents were destroyed when a barrel bomb fell on my house." We will ask when and where that happened, and then we can check with Intelligence Community or often even open-source information to find out if that is realistic. Was that happening at that place at that time?

We have a multifaceted approach to this. We have actually reduced the number of interviews we ask our officers to do of Syrian

cases because we recognize that they are so complex and we want the officers to be able to explore all of that information, often informed by the up-front individualized research that Mr. Emrich has described. If there are issues, we can come back—

Chairman SESSIONS. I am not doubting your dedication to try to do right with the ability that you have. On February 11th, before the House Committee on Homeland Security, FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach expressed significant concerns with screening Syrian refugees. I do not see how this can be denied. I do not see how you can gloss over this. He says quote, “The concern is Syria is that we do not have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet.” That would be the concern, is we would be vetting data bases that do not hold information on those individuals, and that is a concern.

He went on to say, “You are talking about a country that is a failed state, that is, does not have any infrastructure, so to speak.” All of the data sets, the police, the intel services, that normally you would go to to seek information do not exist.

Mr. Emrich, you query these systems. Is that your responsibility? Just yes or no. Do you supervise making the inquiries?

Mr. EMRICH. I do.

Chairman SESSIONS. If there is no data base to query, then how can you have valid information?

Mr. EMRICH. There is data that we check against, and we would be happy to describe this to you in a different setting.

Chairman SESSIONS. You just tell us under oath. You are a public official. Do you think there is adequate data, when you query these data bases, are you likely to have any valuable information from them?

Mr. EMRICH. I will tell you that we often find valuable information and that we check every single thing that is available to us.

Chairman SESSIONS. I am sure you check everything that is available. Mr. Steinbach I think is making the plain fact that there are no real data bases in Syria to check. Isn't that right?

Mr. EMRICH. We check—we check everything that we are aware of within U.S. Government holdings. We are either inquiring about looking into or we currently check. As far as I am concerned, if we have not overturned every stone, we are in the process of overturning every stone.

Chairman SESSIONS. There you go again. We are turning over everything that we can overturn. I do not deny that. American police officers check the National Crime Information Center on everybody they arrest. They do not have a National Crime Information Center. You do not have access to their criminal history records. Those are in, I guess, Assad's control. They do not have a computer data base that you can access. Isn't Mr. Steinbach telling the truth? Do you disagree with what I read from him that the things that you would normally check just do not exist?

Mr. EMRICH. I would point out that in many countries of the world from which we have traditionally accepted refugees over the years, the U.S. Government did not have extensive data holdings.

Chairman SESSIONS. All right. Mr. Franken, I am sorry to run over. Thank you. Not too badly.

Senator FRANKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Anytime.

Ms. Strack, in prior years we have admitted far more refugees than we currently do. In 1980, we admitted about 200,000 refugees. In the early 1990's, we admitted over 100,000 per year. Last year, in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, we admitted fewer than 70,000.

It seems to me that the numbers we are bringing in today are pretty modest by comparison. It also seems to me that our past experience has demonstrated that we can resettle refugees in a manner that is consistent with our national security.

Ms. Strack, what do you draw from our past experiences in admitting refugees? Can you describe the measures in place that ensure that those admitted to the United States will contribute positively to our society?

Ms. STRACK. Senator, I think there may be several of us on the panel who would like to speak to your question. I think it is important to remember in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, there was a pause in refugee resettlement, and it was a desire to make sure that the best screening available was in place in the wake of that situation. For 2 years, the United States Refugee Resettlement Program had very, very low numbers, that I would say those of us who work in this field for a living consider disappointingly low numbers, but it was necessary at the time to make sure that those appropriate safeguards were in place.

I think having those safeguards in place, we have worked very diligently on an interagency basis, and, again, with strong relationships with law enforcement, national security, and intelligence community so that we are able to have the program grow in a way that we think is responsible, it has integrity, and it is consistent with our national security obligations.

Senator FRANKEN. Anyone else care to jump in on that?

Mr. BARTLETT. Sir, I would just say that, in addition to 9/11, I think with the Iraq response and our resettlement response to Iraqis and any obligation I think that we owe to many of those—well, to all those Iraqis who worked for us, we also layered on a new check, and that was a moment in time when a new check was developed with two different security agencies, and that also impacted our arrivals. Again, we did that out of a sense of responsibility to the people that—not only the people that we are bringing here but the people that we are bringing them to, you know, our communities.

I think you are correct that we have had larger programs in the past. In response, I think the infrastructure we work with now is a little more complicated. We are—the intention is to not only grow this 85,000 program to 100,000, perhaps in years beyond, we will see; but to do it in a way that is responsible to our communities.

Senator FRANKEN. Before I run out of time, I want to ask this question, which I think speaks to the whole hearing, the whole subject in a different way. I am not sure if anyone has asked this. I am sorry. I went down to the floor and gave a speech on something else.

I think it bears repeating that approximately 4 million people have fled violence in Syria, and that is roughly 17 percent of the country's total population, and, of course, those that are internally displaced. Families, many of them with children, are braving these

treacherous journeys in order to escape persecution. Senator Durbin brought up Aylan Kurdi and that picture that I do not think anyone who has seen it will ever forget. And like Senator Durbin, I have a grandson who that image reminds me very much of.

I think—also Senator Durbin—do you mind if I go a few seconds over?

Chairman SESSIONS. No.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I do.

Senator FRANKEN. You do?

[Laughter.]

Senator FRANKEN. Okay. I will do this as fast as I can.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I am just kidding.

Senator FRANKEN. Okay. I never know when you are kidding.

[Laughter.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I just want to know why he got the louder laugh.

Senator FRANKEN. Timing.

[Laughter.]

This is such a sober subject. Many of our partners in the EU are formulating a plan—are going to redistribute some 120,000 migrants among member states. Germany has stepped up. The U.S., on the other hand, thus far has accepted only 1,500 Syrian refugees, although the administration plans to expand the number to 10,000. I have joined colleagues—Senator Durbin mentioned the letter that he and Senator Klobuchar led. I was on that letter saying—this is quite a while ago—urging the administration to resettle 65,000 by the end of 2016.

This is what I want to ask, because I think these numbers are important in the context of the debate about national security. Director Bartlett, do you think that strong leadership from the United States on this issue would boost our standing in the region? Should we not be concerned that a tepid response here lends credence to the kind of narrative that our enemies spin about the United States in their efforts to sow discord?

Mr. BARTLETT. Sir, I would submit that our leadership has been strong in the region. We stepped up early on, not just for the Syrian crisis but also the Iraqi crisis. You know, our footprint originally in the region was emergency response, and people have asked us before, you know, why we have been slow to resettle. We are not the only ones who have been slow to resettle affirmatively. UNHCR, in fact, only started a resettlement program about 2 years ago for Syrians because the hope for the Syrian people, and I think the hope of the international community, is that people can go home. That is really what any refugee wants, is they want the ability to go home, and that is to Syria.

It is really only about 2 years ago that UNHCR as an institution said it has been too long, the countries that are hosting these refugees are bearing too much of a responsibility, and we need to help. UNHCR was very aggressive in setting a pretty high benchmark for all of us. We joined early on. We did not announce a number. We did not announce a goal. We basically said we are open for referrals. At the moment we have 19,000, and we are going to continue to accept those. Although we have a 10,000-entrant goal for

this next year, we are not limited by that goal, and we will continue to accept referrals from UNHCR as this tragedy continues.

Senator FRANKEN. Thank you. I would just submit—and I am way over. I would submit that that is something to be thinking about. Thank you.

Ms. STRACK. Senator, if I may just add very briefly, Senator Durbin mentioned in his opening remarks that we do have a long process in the U.S. program in order for someone to come into the system, our average processing times. I do not think any of us are satisfied with those average processing times, and I can tell you that I have very strong direction from my Deputy Secretary to look hard at the places where we can effect efficiencies without cutting corners in any way in order to see that we can be more efficient so that when those referrals do come to us, we are able to process them effectively and efficiently as much as we possibly can.

Chairman SESSIONS. Senator Franken, I would just note that in 2013 the United States issued 117,000 green cards—that is permanent residency in the United States, a pathway to citizenship—to migrants from Muslim countries, including 70,000 to migrants from just Middle Eastern countries, admitted 40,000 designated refugees and asylum seekers—refugees and asylum seeker, which are essentially the same, from all Muslim nations. I think we have been generous.

Senator FRANKEN. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SESSIONS. I just wanted to make that point. I understand. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank Senator Franken for his excellent questions and his comments. He is absolutely right that this issue deserves the most sober of treatment.

I beg to differ, Mr. Bartlett. We may have stepped up more recently, but we have done far less than we should have in the region. Having visited some of those camps, al-Zaatari, for example, I think the United States could and should have done more and now can and should do more. Not just because it improves our standing in the region, but it improves our sense of self-worth as a Nation. We are a Nation of immigrants, and many of those immigrants are refugees, like my father who came to this country in 1935 to escape persecution in Germany at the age of 17, speaking virtually no English, having not much more than the shirt on his back, and knowing almost no one. This country gave him a chance to succeed, just as we will countless other refugees in the future, as we have done in the past with refugees of many, many other countries. The need for this program is as serious and urgent as ever because there is no shortage in the world of inhumane dictators, territorial conflicts, environmental crises that contribute to the largest refugee crisis since World War II. That is what we are facing right now.

My view is that we need to improve and speed the screening techniques because the American people need to be satisfied, as has been expressed here, about the efficacy and accuracy of those screening techniques.

I have proposed a number of reforms, three in particular, for example, expanding the P3 program, which gives resettlement appli-

cants with U.S. families the ability to skip the referrals from the UNHCR and apply directly to the Resettlement Support Center; second, improving the timing and security of medical and security screenings to ensure that applicants or their entire families do not have their checks expire, forcing them to redo many of those screenings, when individual parts of the test expire while they are waiting for other parts to be completed; and, third, keeping families updated about their status. Frequently a large family's resettlement will be delayed because a single family member is waiting to be approved.

Those are kind of commonsense, straightforward methods of reforming the screening process so that it takes weeks, not years, to reach conclusion, and I think they are doable. They may require more resources. That is where the U.S. Congress should be involved, and I will be sending a letter within a few days detailing those proposals.

The large audience here I think is testimony to the importance of this subject, again, not just because of our standing or image in the world but our self-image, our self-worth, our view of ourselves as a Nation. My feeling is that the American people still believe that we are the Nation of the Statue of Liberty, that we have arms open to people who want to come here for opportunity and freedom and to escape persecution and harm abroad.

Mr. Chairman, if there is no objection, I would like to enter into the record some of the evidence of that widespread interest and support: a letter from former Republican and Democratic officials, including Ambassadors Ryan Crocker and Robert Ford, and former Bush administration official Robert Wolfowitz, calling for the United States to accept 100,000 Syrian refugees; a letter from 18 mayors, including Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, asking the Obama administration to resettle Syrian refugees in their cities because, I am quoting, "refugees make our communities stronger economically, socially, and culturally," end of quote; and a letter signed by 400 faith leaders expressing strong opposition to any effort to limit the resettlement of Muslim refugees.

Chairman SESSIONS. Without objection.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

[The information appears as a submission for the record.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. If I may just ask a question, although I am, with your permission, going beyond my time. Mr. Bartlett, and anyone else who wants to answer, if the P3 program were expanded to settlement applicants with American family members, would that have any negative impact on our national security? Would you be willing to consider such an expansion?

Ms. STRACK. Senator, I think that is something we would certainly take under advisement and discuss amongst ourselves. There have historically been some problems with the Priority 3 program in terms of false claims of family relationships. You may be aware we suspended the program for a period of time until we were able to reintroduce some integrity features. I think with the proposed expansion of the eligibility categories in the United States, we would want to think about it very carefully through that lens and based on that experience to make sure that in expanding it that we had the appropriate safeguards at the same time.

If I may mention, of your three points that you addressed earlier, I think on the second piece about improving the timing of security checks and addressing the issue of having them expire, that has traditionally been a challenge for all of us. We do have some recent improvements I think we could share with you and brief your staff. We have introduced some automation just this past summer, with the agencies that do the vetting, and we believe that is going to address significantly—through the institution of recurrent vetting is going to help us ameliorate that problem of security checks expiring and the challenges that that has presented to us. I think we will have some positive news for you on that score.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Does anyone else want to address that question?

[No response.]

I am aware that some changes have been implemented. I would be interested not only in your plans but in evidence that, in fact, they are having an effect, because I think that the credibility of the entire Refugee Settlement Program hinges on effective screening, and one of the principal measures of effectiveness is timeliness. The delays can, in effect, be self-fulfilling expectations when those tests or screenings in effect expire, and they should expire after a period of time, but they need to be done more expeditiously.

I thank the Chairman for his patience. I have a lot more questions which I will submit for the record.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Chairman SESSIONS. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

I thank you, panel, I would just kind of like to walk through some of the details of how you do your work, because I believe that as presently constructed, we are not able to do what you are suggesting today we are able to do, and the costs are much greater, Mr. Carey, than you suggested in your statement. We have got billions of dollars in costs that are going to occur as a result of all the programs that refugees are entitled to receive. While we had 18 Democratic mayors asking President Obama to send more Syrian refugees to their cities, homelessness in the United States has doubled since the last recession. We have a financial crisis, too. Every new dollar spent on these refugees will essentially be borrowed because it is new expenditure and we do not have new revenue to pay for it.

New York City Mayor de Blasio called for more refugees, but had originally said this is a European problem. I do not think the Europeans helped us with the Central American problem. We have got countries like Brazil and Argentina that are not taking any refugees. New York City Hall announced it would spend \$1 billion more over the next 4 years focusing on homelessness in New York.

I would say somebody needs to be talking about the American people, what we want to do. We want to help. We are helping. We are doing more financially than any other country in the world to help deal with this crisis. I do not accept the idea that we are not doing our fair share. Europe should be picking up the largest share of the problem, frankly, and I do not see it there. A good policy is that people should be helped to stay as close to home as possible, and our overriding policy goal should be to create stability in Syria and Libya and Yemen and Iraq so people can go home. We have

allowed that to get away from us. We can criticize our policymakers for allowing this dangerous humanitarian disaster to occur. I just would say I think we have to ask those questions about who we are going to serve and whose interest we are trying to serve.

Mr. Emrich, can you name a single computer data base outside of maybe some very, very small but significantly valuable intelligence data bases for Syria that you run a check against? Does Syria have any that you can access?

Mr. EMRICH. The Government of Syria does not, no, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. All right. Fundamentally, they are the ones that keep records. We keep them in the United States on people who are arrested and so forth. They—you do not have access to any if they exist in Syria?

Mr. EMRICH. As Ms. Strack mentioned, in most cases these individuals do have documents from Syria. We do have various ways of identifying those documents. As she described, our officers are trained in fraud detection. I would be happy to—we would be happy to brief you in another setting on some of the ways that we have to do this.

Chairman SESSIONS. In a public setting—I am asking you to be—talk to the American people. The American people are asking you a question. I read what the FBI Director said. He said there is no data base to check. He suggests there is no way that they can get sufficient information on—implies a substantial majority of these persons. Aren't you left to basically look at whatever document they produce and conducting an interview?

Mr. EMRICH. I can assure the American people that we have a robust series of screening measures here that encompass the wide range of U.S. Government resources, that involve U.S. law enforcement agencies and Intelligence Community members, that these processes and these screening measures are constantly reviewed, that we are continuously looking at ways to improve these, that they incorporate both biometric and biographic checks; they incorporate an in-depth interview with a trained U.S. Government officer; they involve an additional interview—or inspection, rather, when the person presents himself or herself at the U.S. port of entry.

Ms. STRACK. Senator, if I may, we have not—

Chairman SESSIONS. Wait a minute—I am just going to say this: I have been in law enforcement 15 years. I know how the National Crime Information Center works. I know how you run background checks, Mr. Emrich. There is no way you can do background checks of any significance. I am sure we have some intelligence data on a number of people throughout the region, and if you get a hit on that, I am sure you would reject them. You have only a minuscule number of people that have been identified, I am sure, in that fashion. I do not believe you can tell us with any certainty that you have an ability to conduct an efficient background check.

Let us say you have no information. Let us say there is a question. Do you have any ability to send an investigator to Iraq to check and see if the person actually lived on this street, actually had the job he claims to have had?

Ms. STRACK. Sir, if I may—

Chairman SESSIONS. I was talking to Mr. Emrich.

Ms. STRACK. Okay.

Mr. EMRICH. While we do not have the ability to send an investigator to Syria, we do have resources that we can use to verify various elements of someone's testimony and story.

Chairman SESSIONS. I am sure there are things you could do. Are you telling us you can do that for a majority of the people that you interview? You have the ability for a majority of the people you interview to have independent data of value to help identify them?

Mr. EMRICH. We in many cases, are able to find independent data.

Chairman SESSIONS. Many cases. I asked a majority.

Mr. EMRICH. I cannot quantify. I have seen—

Chairman SESSIONS. Twenty percent or 80 percent you get positive data from? Can you tell us? Is it less than 20 or more than 80?

Mr. EMRICH. I cannot give you a number.

Chairman SESSIONS. The reason is you do not have the ability. I wish you did, but you do not. Ms. Strack.

Ms. STRACK. Mr. Emrich covered the point I was going to cover, sir.

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Chair, if I could just—sorry, not on security screening, but I want to go back to a point you made about humanitarian response.

Chairman SESSIONS. Right.

Mr. BARTLETT. The U.S. responsibilities versus those of other countries in the world. I know you mentioned Brazil is not taking refugees. I wanted to set the record straight that Brazil, in fact, has stepped up quite large in terms of the Syria crisis. They have done a humanitarian visa program and have allowed thousands of Syrians to come to Brazil. They are not coming technically as refugees, but they are coming from the immediate region of the Middle East. There are about 30 countries that are involved in refugee resettlement of Syrians, and so, you know, you are right, right now Europe is taking the bulk because people are moving across land borders. There are countries like New Zealand, Australia, and Canada that are also playing a significant role.

Thank you.

Chairman SESSIONS. According to the information I have, the United States has 6 times more migrants than all the Latin American countries combined. Do you dispute that?

Mr. BARTLETT. I am only talking about refugees at this point, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. I have also seen numbers that indicate that perhaps they have agreed in recent—how long ago was that that they have agreed to step up their—

Mr. BARTLETT. It has been within the last year. It might be 6 to 8 months. They have done quite a large job.

Chairman SESSIONS. All right. We have been doing it for a long time. We have been very generous and I think the world leader in doing this. We are proud of that, and we want to be a great country for handling refugees. I just believe that we need to understand the reality, how much it is going to cost and the danger of admitting those who could be a threat to the United States.

Ms. Strack, there was a number of examples of people who have involved themselves in terrorism since they have been in the

United States. Sometimes when they come, they may not be radicalized, but somehow, some way, become radicalized. There is no way you could identify that, I do not suppose. Is there?

Ms. STRACK. No, sir, we cannot predict the future.

Chairman SESSIONS. We know the Boston bombers came as refugees.

Ms. STRACK. They did not, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. They did not? How did they come?

Ms. STRACK. I would have to check with some of my colleagues, but they were not refugees.

Chairman SESSIONS. Were their parents refugees?

Ms. STRACK. I will need to check with some of my other USCIS colleagues.

Chairman SESSIONS. We had a Bosnian refugee along with wife and relatives charged with donating money, supplies, and smuggled arms to terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq. I do not think that is in dispute. Ramiz Hodzic and his wife were among six Bosnians living in Minnesota, Illinois, and New York who were charged last week conspiring to provide material support to groups that we consider terrorist organizations.

An Uzbek refugee living in Idaho was arrested and charged with providing support to terrorist organizations in the form of teaching terror recruits how to build a bomb.

Somali Americans in Minnesota were charged—seven were charged with trying to join ISIS.

It is not an easy job. There is always risk. We want to be sure you are fully equipped and able to do the best job we can, and I think we should be careful as we go forward and always try to protect the national safety, as you indicate.

Do you know, can any of you tell me how many people who have been given refugee status since 2001 have been identified as affiliated with terrorism in any manner?

[No response.]

Chairman SESSIONS. We have got a lot of public records on them. I certainly do not have the full number, that is for sure.

USCIS is generally fee-funded. Of course, there are a lot of things you could spend those fees on, and if you use fees to expand dramatically the number of refugees from Syria or other places in the Middle East, that does tend to drain the money, does it not, Ms. Strack, that you would otherwise have for other needs of your agency?

Ms. STRACK. Yes, sir. In order to reprioritize fee funding to the refugee program in FY 2016, that will come out of other USCIS priorities.

Chairman SESSIONS. To follow up on, I guess, Mr. Tillis' or Mr. Perdue's question, Mr. Bartlett, if we go to 100,000, are you aware of how many of those over the 75,000 this year—that is 25,000 more—how many of those would be coming from Syria and/or the region?

Mr. BARTLETT. We do not have a projection what it would look like when we bring 100,000 in. What I can tell you is that we traditionally respond to the humanitarian crisis of the time. In the last 5 years, we have resettled a number of Burmese, Bhutanese, Somalis, Iraqis—some of those who worked for us—now increasingly

Syrians, and Congolese. We have had a very big program build on the Congolese coming out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who have been in basically asylum, kind of temporary asylum conditions for many, many years. We will again, those will be the populations. They will shift according to, you know, if peace, for example, exists or if conditions exist to be able to return home, then those populations decline. One would predict that probably Syria and Iraq would continue to be large.

Chairman SESSIONS. Secretary Kerry indicated that when he gave us some sort of consultation. He told us—he floated the figure 75,000 for next year, then 85,000 we heard. He told us, he warned us it might be substantially more. 100,000 would certainly be a lot, well within what he suggested he may recommend. We do not get fees from those, do we, Ms. Strack? I mean, it is a normal immigrant that has to pay fees that help subsidize these kind of procedures.

Ms. STRACK. That is correct, sir. There is no fee to apply for refugee status.

Chairman SESSIONS. The Washington Post said that Azar Zareb and his wife arrived in 2002 as refugees. Their sons and daughters followed a short time later—from Chechnya, of course. It indicates at least the parents, if not the sons, came as refugees, would it not?

Ms. STRACK. I would need to check with my colleagues, sir.

Chairman SESSIONS. What about the parole program? Is that under the Homeland Security section?

Ms. STRACK. It actually is a shared responsibility with the dissolution of the former Immigration and Nationality Service into the immigration operational divisions at Department of Homeland Security. CBP, Customs and Border Protection, as well as USCIS have parole authority.

Chairman SESSIONS. It was indicated in a staff briefing that DHS is looking at a categorical case-by-case program for parole, which is a program that has, I think, some difficulties. I am not sure it is the kind of thing that ought to be done with regard to Syria, but apparently it is being considered. Is it still being considered, to your knowledge, using the parole program to deal with the Syrian problem?

Ms. STRACK. Sir, the USCIS received a letter that had been signed by 70 Members of Congress asking the administration to consider what we have called a “Syrian family reunification parole program.” At the time there was a model based on a Cuban family reunification program. Under the design of the Cuban program, family members in the United States were eligible to apply for green cards for their family members. It is the Form I-130. They are eligible for that application and had been approved beneficiaries, but their family members were not able to actually take advantage of that and come to the United States because of the numerical limits on family based immigration every year. The program in Cuba was to take those people who are, in fact, eligible for green cards and let them come to the United States and wait in the United States in lieu of waiting in Cuba. The letter that we received recommended that the administration consider a similar sort of program, so this would be a relative in the United States who would petition on behalf of a close relative, and if that bene-

fiary was a Syrian, the recommendation was that we consider granting parole to that Syrian beneficiary.

At the time, the administration made a decision not to do that program at that point in time. As the conditions have continued to deteriorate and as we have had requests from other stakeholders to take another look at that, my leadership has agreed that they would take another look at that program. It does not mean that the decision will change, but they have agreed to consider it.

Chairman SESSIONS. You got a request, and I am sure you should consider it. I think that is a problematic way to do business. We are increasing the numbers of refugees for Syria, and I think that is the appropriate way to openly and directly deal with that. The parole system was never designed to be used in this fashion, as I understand the law.

With regard to resettlement, I guess, Mr. Carey, does that fall within your area?

Mr. CAREY. Yes, it does.

Chairman SESSIONS. In general, I believe you had some sort of consultation with communities about a desire to resettle a number of people in their community. What is your policy on that? Can you assure us that any community that would receive a direct flow of refugees would be consulted before this happens?

Mr. CAREY. I believe I will defer to my colleagues at the Department of State on that who handled the admissions and placement portion of the program.

Mr. BARTLETT. Sir, I can—the State Department has the responsibility first for the placement of the refugees in U.S. communities, and HHS' responsibilities then are longer term in terms of support and integration, adjustment. We have—again, we do consult very closely at the community level. We put the responsibility on the partner in that community, so the affiliates I talked about before, 320 or so. We ask them—in fact, we require them to do consultations each quarter of the year.

Chairman SESSIONS. Consultations with the Mayor or the Governor?

Mr. BARTLETT. Consultations included elected officials, so it could be city council as well as mayor. It includes other people who are providing services, so schools, health clinics, other medical service providers, law enforcement, as well as volunteer groups that are supporting refugees. We want to talk with the broad community, not just the people who are involved exactly in the resettlement program, but also people who are affected by it. So, that consultation takes place quarterly. That consultation includes a representative from the State government, so somebody who is working either attached to the Governor's office or who has communication with the Governor's office, and then those consultations are fed back through the national headquarters and then to the State Department.

What I can assure you is—and, in fact, I was just in Twin Falls, Idaho, 2 weeks ago—that we want to listen to every voice in the community. Not everybody is a supporter of refugees. Not everybody is a supporter of Syrian resettlement. We want to take all of those voices into account and see how we can respond. What I can tell you is that overwhelmingly we find that the majority of citizens

appreciate the program and support it. We want to find a way to make that work for everybody.

Chairman SESSIONS. Very good. We are talking about a very major undertaking. A Heritage Foundation study has reported that 10,000 refugees over a lifetime will cost the United States Treasury \$4 billion—excuse me, \$6.5 billion for 10,000, because most of the people are going to struggle at lower incomes. There is a cost on that. Then you say you go to 30,000, 70,000, 100,000, that is a substantial cost. Each year if you did another 100,000, over 30 years you have increased a very large number of people statistically speaking will be drawing more benefits than they pay in. It puts stress on Medicare, it puts stress on the food stamp program, it puts stress on Social Security and Medicare, because most will pay into the program presumably if they work, but like most people they will pay in less than they take out, and that is why those programs are on such a crisis path today. It is a huge financial cost.

Then we have the difficulty of being able to screen the applicants effectively, and I think if you need more help, Mr. Emrich or Ms. Strack, I hope you will ask for it. I am worried that it is almost impossible, even with more staff, to really get the information because we are not going to be able, as some people might think, to go out to the neighborhood and actually interview people to make sure this is the same person who lived on this street, that worked at this job, and was a good and decent person. We see that in Europe, how it is happening in huge numbers.

I believe the American people are generous and kind and decent. They want to contribute to helping solve this refugee crisis. We are in a significant degree. We are entitled to have our officials protect our interest, the people's interest, and that is what I think we have tried to do today. I do not blame any of you for the difficult job you have, but I do think that we need to ask ourselves how so much instability occurred in the world. We need to ask ourselves how we can positively assure that stability is returned to as much of that area of the world as possible and to try to create a circumstance and financially help in a humanitarian way people that are really hurting. Many of them are, and we know that.

Thank you for your service to your country. We appreciate that. The record will stay open for 1 week, and you are dismissed. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 4:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows.]

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

LAWRENCE BARTLETT
Director, Office of Refugee Admissions
BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR A HEARING ON

**“REFUGEE ADMISSIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2016”**

BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION & THE NATIONAL INTEREST

OCTOBER 1, 2015
2:00 P.M.
226 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC

Testimony of Director of Office of Refugee Admissions Lawrence Bartlett

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and distinguished Senators, thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the importance of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee with my colleagues from the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and to update you on the measures we have taken to protect refugees around the world and provide new homes to some of the most vulnerable. My part of this testimony will address the Department of State's leadership of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Description of the Need

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) latest statistics, there are nearly 20 million refugees in the world. The vast majority of these refugees will receive support in the country to which they fled until they can voluntarily and safely return home. The United States contributes to the programs of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, and other international and non-governmental organizations that provide protection and assistance to refugees until they can return home. In 2014, some 126,800 refugees voluntarily repatriated to their country of origin – the lowest recorded number since 1983. A small number of refugees may be allowed to become citizens in the country to which they fled, and an even smaller number -- primarily those who are the most vulnerable -- will be resettled in a third country. While UNHCR reports that fewer than 1% of all refugees are eventually resettled in third countries, the United States welcomes over half of these refugees.

The crisis in Syria is a dramatic illustration of the humanitarian situation refugees face. Syrians are now the largest refugee population in the world, numbering over four million. Another 7.6 million have fled their homes but are trying to survive inside Syria in other areas. The Government of Turkey estimates that it now hosts almost two million Syrians. Over one million Syrian refugees are living in Lebanon. Jordan hosts over 600,000 Syrians and has established the largest refugee camp in the Middle East to provide temporary protection for tens of thousands. Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

In the Syrian context, the impact on hosting communities in countries of first asylum is overwhelming. Schools have moved to double-shifts to accommodate Syrian children. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon. The United States has provided over USD 4.5 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syrian crisis, including essential needs like food, shelter, health care and education. Beyond the clear humanitarian case for resettlement, our resettlement of Syrian refugees helps to promote regional stability.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over three million refugees from all over the world. Refugees have built new lives in communities in all 50 states. The United States is proud of its history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. As Secretary Kerry said recently, “All of us in positions of responsibility, nations with power and capacity and opportunity, have an obligation to come together and restore hope.” As such, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) reflects the United States’ highest values and aspirations of compassion, generosity and leadership.

During its history, the USRAP has responded to changing circumstances. The end of the Cold War dramatically altered the context in which the USRAP operated. The program shifted its focus away from large groups concentrated in a few locations (primarily refugees from Vietnam and the former Soviet Union) and began to admit refugees representing over 50 nationalities per year. In FY 2015 we admitted refugees of 67 nationalities. Resettlement opportunities are focused on refugees who have immediate needs for durable and lasting solutions.

While maintaining the United States’ leadership role in humanitarian protection, an integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who are eligible for such protection and who are not known to present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, the USRAP is committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States and applicants to the USRAP are subject to more intensive screening than any other type of traveler to the U.S. to protect against threats to our national security. The Department of State collaborates with the Department of Homeland Security on this, and also collaborates closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to protect the health of U.S. - bound refugees and the U.S. public.

Refugees resettled in the United States enrich our nation. The USRAP is premised on the idea that refugees should become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The Department of State works domestically with agencies participating in the Reception and Placement program to ensure that refugees receive services in the first thirty to ninety days after arrival in accordance with established standards. During and after the initial resettlement period, the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR) provides leadership, technical assistance, and funding to states, the District of Columbia, and nonprofit organizations to help refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society.

To better prepare refugees for arrival in the United States, the USRAP provides several days of overseas cultural orientation where possible. To strengthen the integration of refugees and immigrants and ensure that all community members have the tools and opportunities to fully contribute to the nation, the White House Task Force on New Americans prepared a plan to better integrate refugees and immigrants into American communities. Under this plan, federal agencies are taking actions such as extending competitive grant funding for citizenship preparation programs in communities across the country, and providing information and tools to employers about increasing access to ESL courses, education services, and other training programs for immigrant and refugee workers.

Upon arrival, refugees are immediately eligible for employment, and after one year are required to apply for adjustment of status to that of lawful permanent resident. Five years after admission, a refugee who has been granted lawful permanent resident status is eligible to apply for citizenship. The vast majority of refugees go on to lead productive lives, receive an education and work hard. Some serve in the U.S. military and undertake other forms of service for their communities and our country.

Scale and Populations

The scale of the USRAP has been adjusted since 1975 in response to refugee needs. At its highest level in 1980, more than 200,000 refugees were admitted to the United States in response to large displacements from Southeast Asia, Cuba, and those fleeing religious persecution from the Soviet Union. After 9/11, arrivals fell dramatically until additional security protocols could be implemented for all U.S. immigration programs. For the past three fiscal years the USRAP has met its target for refugee arrivals, an unprecedented achievement in the program's history. In FY 2016 the program is intended to grow to serve 85,000 refugees, at least 10,000 of whom will be Syrians, in order to respond to the increased needs in the Middle East.

We are planning for 25,000 African refugee arrivals in FY 2016. Two countries of origin – Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – will account for the vast majority of refugee admissions from Africa, followed by refugees from Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. We expect to admit up to 13,000 refugees from East Asia. These will include up to 6,000 members of Burmese ethnic minorities (mostly Karen and Karenni) living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, some 6,000 Burmese (of various ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, and a small number of urban refugees of various nationalities in the region.

The allocation for refugees from the Near East and South Asia for FY 2016 is 34,000, including vulnerable Iraqis, Bhutanese, Iranians, Syrians, Pakistanis, and Afghans. Syrian refugees will make up at least 10,000 of this regional allocation. Iraqis who worked for the U.S. military, government, or U.S.-based media organization or NGO will be another important population resettled from this region. We also expect individual UNHCR referrals of members of various religious and ethnic minority groups in the region.

The FY 2016 allocation for refugees from Europe and Central Asia is 4,000 individuals. The overwhelming majority of these are expected to be members of religious minorities from Russia and Eurasia processed under the Lautenberg Amendment. While Jews comprised an average of 85% of the applicant pool in the early nineties, Evangelical Christians now make up over 90% of the applicant pool. Applications for the Lautenberg program have increased substantially since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine.

The 3,000 allocation for Latin America and the Caribbean for FY 2016 comprises Cuban refugees eligible for the in-country program; Central American minors eligible for the in-country program; UNHCR-referred Colombians; as well as a small number of family reunification cases. We are holding 6,000 unallocated admissions numbers to be used, if needed, for additional

refugee admissions from any region. The unallocated numbers would only be used following notification to Congress.

Services and Support at the Community Level

The USRAP enjoys substantial support from state and local governments as well as community members. The program resettles refugees to 48 states, 173 cities and towns, and 304 sites. As a public-private partnership, it requires the support of American non-governmental organizations, charities, faith-based groups and thousands of volunteers and supporters of the program in hundreds of communities across the country. Recently the Department of State has received an outpouring of interest from individuals, churches, and community organizations wishing to help with Syrian refugee resettlement.

Benefits and services for refugees include the Reception and Placement grant provided by the State Department and time-limited assistance programs (up to eight months from arrival) and social service programs (up to five years) funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR). These programs help refugees find employment, become economically self-sufficient, and integrate into American society. The Administration will continue to explore ways of sustaining a strong federal-state-community partnership and ensuring that refugees can integrate successfully.

Conclusion

In closing, let me thank you again for holding this hearing. While starting life anew in the United States may be daunting, it also offers hope and unparalleled opportunity. It is a chance not only to escape from violence and persecution but to start again. The assistance the American people provide helps newcomers find their footing and become a part of their new communities. Refugees are not the only ones who benefit; they add to America's vitality and diversity and make substantial contributions to our economic and cultural life. With the continued support of Congress and the American people, refugee resettlement will remain a proud American tradition for many years to come.

Thank you.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

BARBARA L. STRACK

Chief, Refugee Affairs Division

**REFUGEE, ASYLUM, AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES**

and

MATTHEW D. EMRICH

Acting Associate Director

**FRAUD DETECTION AND NATIONAL SECURITY DIRECTORATE
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES**

FOR A HEARING ON

**“REFUGEE ADMISSIONS,
FISCAL YEAR 2016”**

BEFORE

**THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION & THE NATIONAL INTEREST**

OCTOBER 1, 2015

2:00 P.M.

**226 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC**

Statement of Barbara L. Strack, Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and Matthew D. Emrich, Acting Associate Director, Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the refugee admissions program, with particular emphasis on Fiscal Year 2016. As the Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division within the Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), my staff and I work in close partnership with colleagues at the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), with other components within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and with colleagues in the law enforcement and intelligence communities to meet the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program's (USRAP) mission to offer resettlement opportunities to eligible refugees while safeguarding the integrity of the program and our national security.

As you know, the United States has a proud and long-standing tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity to refugees from around the world who live in fear of persecution and are often left to languish in difficult conditions of temporary asylum. USCIS remains dedicated to fulfilling this mission, in partnership with PRM, and continuing the United States' leadership role in humanitarian protection. An integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go to those who are eligible for such protection and who do not present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, we are committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States, and we continue to employ the highest security measures to protect against risks to our national security.

As a representative of USCIS, I can assure you that this commitment to our humanitarian and national security mandates is shared inside and outside of DHS. The refugee resettlement

program has forged strong and deep relationships with colleagues in the law enforcement, national security, and intelligence communities and we continue to benefit enormously from their expertise, analysis, and collaboration. It simply would not be possible for us to support a resettlement program of the size and scope that the United States maintains without this critical interagency infrastructure.

My testimony today will describe USCIS's role in refugee resettlement generally, and I will discuss the screening measures and safeguards that have been developed by the USRAP and enhanced over time. While many of these enhancements were first deployed in connection with the Iraqi refugee resettlement program, they are now being applied more broadly to applicants of all nationalities, including Syrians who now represent a growing portion of our caseload.

DHS and other interagency partners have conducted a number of classified briefings for committee staff on these topics, and I would be happy to follow up with a classified briefing after today's hearing, if that would be useful to the Subcommittee.

Refugee Resettlement Case Processing

As I mentioned above, the USRAP is a shared operational responsibility of the State Department and USCIS, among other agencies. The State Department is responsible for the overarching coordination and management of the USRAP, including the decision on which refugees around the world are granted access to the USRAP for resettlement consideration. As contemplated by section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, this work is guided each year by a Presidential determination, which sets the refugee admissions ceiling following consultations with Congress. USCIS is responsible for conducting individual, in-person interviews with applicants to determine their eligibility for refugee status, including whether they meet the refugee definition and are otherwise admissible to the United States under U.S. law.

To maximize flexibility and program integrity, in 2005 USCIS created the Refugee Corps, a cadre of specially-trained USCIS officers who are dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status overseas. These officers are based in Washington, D.C., but they travel to multiple locations around the world. In addition, USCIS has a small number of officers posted at embassies overseas who conduct refugee adjudications, and we assign specially-trained officers from other programs – such as the Asylum Corps, Office of the Chief Counsel, and Administrative Appeals Office – to supplement the Refugee Corps. Using this model, USCIS has been able to respond to an increasingly diverse refugee admissions program, working in 64 countries in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015.

Recognizing that a well-trained cadre of officers is critical to protecting the integrity of the refugee process, we have focused our efforts on providing the highest quality training to our adjudicators. In addition to the basic training required of all USCIS officers, refugee officers receive five weeks of specialized training that includes comprehensive instruction on all aspects of the job, including refugee law, grounds of inadmissibility, fraud detection and prevention, security protocols, interviewing techniques, credibility analysis, and country conditions research. Before deploying overseas, officers also receive pre-departure training which focuses on the specific population that they will be interviewing. This includes information on the types of refugee claims that they are likely to encounter, detailed country of origin information, and updates on any fraud trends or security issues that have been identified. With the advent of large-scale processing of Iraqi applicants in 2007, USCIS officers who adjudicate Iraqi refugee applications began receiving additional two-day training on country-specific issues, including briefings from outside experts from the intelligence, policy, and academic communities. This training has since expanded to a one-week training in order to include Syria-specific topics as well.

In order to fully explore refugee claims and to identify any possible grounds of ineligibility, specially-trained USCIS officers conduct an in-person, in-depth interview of every principal refugee applicant. The officer assesses the credibility of the applicant and evaluates whether the applicant's testimony is consistent with known country conditions. These adjudicators also interview each accompanying family member age 14 and older to determine their admissibility to the United States. In addition, refugee applicants are subject to robust security screening protocols to identify potential fraud, criminal or national security issues. All refugee status determinations made by interviewing officers undergo supervisory review before a final decision is made. Refugee Affairs Division policy requires officers to submit certain categories of sensitive cases – including certain national security-related cases – to Refugee Affairs Division Headquarters to obtain concurrence prior to the issuance of a decision. This allows for Headquarters staff to conduct additional research, liaise with law enforcement or intelligence agencies, or consult with an outside expert before finalizing the decision.

Security Checks

Security checks are an integral part of the USRAP process for applicants of all nationalities, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the State Department and DHS. Refugee applicants are subject to the highest level of security checks, and a refugee applicant is not approved for travel until the results of all required security checks have been obtained and cleared.

All available biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview. Biographic checks

against the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) – which includes watchlist information – are initiated at the time of prescreening by the State Department's Resettlement Support Center (RSC) staff. In addition, an RSC request Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) from the law enforcement and intelligence communities for those cases meeting certain criteria.

In the fall of 2008, USCIS launched a third biographic check with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), which we now refer to as Interagency Checks or "IAC's." Initially the IAC was required only for Iraqi applicants, but the IAC is now required for all refugee applicants within a designated age range, regardless of nationality. In addition, expanded intelligence community support was added to the IAC process in July 2010. In 2015, all partners coordinated to launch IAC recurrent vetting. With recurrent vetting, any intervening derogatory information that is identified after the initial check has cleared but before the applicant has traveled to the United States will be shared with USCIS without the need for a subsequent query.

In addition to these biographic checks, biometric checks against three sets of data are coordinated by USCIS, using mobile fingerprint equipment and photographs which are typically collected at the time of the USCIS interview. These fingerprints are screened against the vast biometric holdings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Next Generation Identification system, and they are screened and enrolled in DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). Through IDENT, applicant fingerprints are screened not only against watchlist information, but also for previous immigration encounters in the United States and overseas – including, for example, cases in which the applicant previously applied for a visa at a U.S. embassy. Starting in 2007, USCIS began to work with the Department of Defense (DoD) to augment biometric screening by checking against the DoD Automated Biometric Identification

System (ABIS). ABIS contains a variety of records, including fingerprint records captured in theatre in Iraq, and it is a valuable resource to identify a wide array of relevant information. Today, ABIS screening has been expanded to refugee applicants of all nationalities who fall within the prescribed age ranges.

In addition to the existing suite of biometric and biographic checks that are applied to refugees regardless of nationality, USCIS has instituted an additional layer of review for Syrian refugee applications, taking into account the myriad actors and dynamic nature of the conflict in Syria. Before being scheduled for interview by a USCIS officer in the field, Syrian cases are reviewed at USCIS headquarters by a Refugee Affairs Division officer. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred to the USCIS' Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) for additional review and research. FDNS conducts open-source and classified research on referred cases and synthesizes an assessment for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity, and it is used by the interviewing officer to inform lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Throughout the review process of Syrian refugee applicants, FDNS engages with law enforcement and intelligence community members for assistance with identity verification, acquisition of additional information, or deconfliction to ensure USCIS activities will not adversely affect an ongoing law enforcement investigation. When FDNS identifies terrorism-related information, it makes the appropriate nominations or enhancements to the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE), using standard interagency watchlisting protocols. Additionally, USCIS drafts and disseminates reports to U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies alerting the interagency to information that meets standing intelligence information requirements.

USCIS continues to work with DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and intelligence community members to identify options for new potential screening opportunities to enhance this already robust suite of checks. Finally, in addition to the checks that I have described, refugee applicants are subject to screening conducted by DHS colleagues at U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program prior to their admission to the United States, as is the case with all individuals traveling to the United States regardless of immigration program.

The Refugee Admissions Pipeline

Given the wide geographic scope of the USRAP, including remote and sometimes dangerous locations, and the complexities of refugee resettlement processing, USCIS coordinates closely with PRM to develop a schedule for refugee interviews each quarter of the Fiscal Year. This yields a "pipeline" of refugee applicants who can be admitted to the United States, once all required security checks, medical examinations, and other pre-travel steps are completed.

In FY 2015, USCIS officers conducted refugee status interviews for applicants from 67 countries. The leading nationalities admitted to the United States were Burmese, Iraqis, and Somalis, as the multi-year program for Bhutanese nationals in Nepal continued its downward trend. Admissions from Africa continued their multiyear increase, notably including larger numbers of Congolese from the Great Lakes region of Africa and resumed processing of Darfuri Sudanese in Eastern Chad.

Refugee processing operations in the Middle East, which have been primarily focused on Iraqi nationals since 2007, expanded to include a larger number of Syrian referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As of late September 2015, the USRAP has received approximately 19,000 referrals of Syrian applicants from UNHCR,

primarily in Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt. The USRAP continues to interview large numbers of Iraqi applicants in these same three locations, and has also resumed processing Iraqi nationals in Baghdad in spring 2015, after a break in operations since June 2014. USCIS was not able to work in Lebanon in FY 2015 – but for one exceptional, one-officer visit – due to space constraints at the embassy, where officers both live and work due to the security conditions.

In Fiscal Years 2013, 2014, and 2015, USCIS and the State Department have succeeded in meeting the annual refugee admissions ceiling of 70,000. This accomplishment reflects a worldwide commitment to refugee protection, as well as intense and committed efforts by all the interagency partners to improve, refine, and enhance the security vetting regime for refugee applicants, while maintaining its integrity and rigor. We will continue these interagency efforts to improve the quality and efficacy of the USRAP security screening regime, including progress toward more automated processes.

USCIS is prepared to work closely with the State Department and other interagency partners to support a larger refugee admissions program of 85,000 arrivals in FY 2016, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees, while assiduously maintaining the integrity of the program and our national security.

I would be happy to answer your questions.



Statement by

**Robert Carey
Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Before the

**Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National
Interest
United States Senate**

October 1, 2015

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) responsibilities in facilitating the resettlement of refugees in the United States. My name is Bob Carey and I am the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Prior to coming to HHS, I served as the Vice President of Resettlement and Migration Policy at the International Rescue Committee, leading the agency's advocacy on refugee, immigration, anti-trafficking, and community development policy issues. In my current position, I oversee ORR's programs, which provide new populations with the opportunity to maximize their potential in the United States. In my testimony today, I will describe the role that HHS plays in relation to refugee resettlement.

Role of the Office of Refugee Resettlement

The Refugee Act of 1980 established ORR within HHS, and outlined the United States' commitment to humanitarian relief through resettlement of persons fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Since the passage of the Act, over three million refugees from more than 70 countries have been given safe haven in the U.S., along with the possibility of a new beginning, and freedom from persecution and displacement. In addition to refugees, ORR serves other humanitarian immigrants, including Cuban entrants, asylees, and survivors of human trafficking. ORR's mission is to link these newly-arrived populations to key resources to maximize their potential in the U.S., and to become integrated and successful members of American society.

The Departments of Homeland Security, State, and HHS work together to advance America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

In fiscal year (FY) 2014, nearly 140,000 individuals were eligible for resettlement services through ORR programs. ORR programs help refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, victims of torture, foreign-born victims of human trafficking, and special immigrant visa holders to become employed and self-sufficient as quickly as possible after their arrival. Iraq was the country of origin for the largest number of refugee arrivals between FY 2009 and FY 2014. Approximately 98,000 refugees came from Iraq, followed by 97,000 from Burma, 73,000 from Bhutan, 34,000 from Somalia, 23,000 came from Cuba and the remainder totaling 78,000 came from other countries.

Refugee arrivals in FY 2014 included 20,000 from Iraq, 15,000 from Burma, 9,000 from Somalia, 8,000 from Bhutan, and 5,000 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The remaining 13,000 arrivals came from 52 other countries.

ORR carries out its mission to serve refugees through various grants and services, administered by state governments and non-profit organizations, including faith-based groups, and an extensive public-private partnership network. Through these grants, ORR provides time-limited cash and medical assistance to newly arrived refugees, as well as case management services, English as a Second Language classes, and job readiness and employment services – all designed to facilitate refugees' successful transition and integration into life in the United States. ORR understands that refugees arrive with distinct skills and experiences, and we strive to provide the

benefits and services necessary to leverage those capacities to help refugees and other eligible populations quickly become self-sufficient and integrated members of American society.

To ensure a successful transition, ORR funds support transitional and medical services for individuals still within their first eight months who are determined not eligible for Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medicaid. Through programs administered by states and by voluntary organizations under the Wilson-Fish Programs, ORR provides cash and medical assistance to eligible populations for up to eight months after their arrival in the U.S. In addition, ORR funds foster care programs for unaccompanied refugee minors, certain minors granted special immigrant juvenile status, and unaccompanied minor victims of a severe form of trafficking.

A portion of new entrants participate in the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program rather than the refugee cash assistance program discussed above. Through the Matching grant program, ORR funds U.S. voluntary resettlement agencies to assist refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency by providing services such as case management, job skill development, job placement and follow up, and interim housing and cash assistance, to help refugees become employed and self-sufficient within their first four months in the U.S. Support may be extended up to six months on a case-by-case basis if deemed necessary. Participating refugees may not access other public cash assistance if they choose to participate in the matching grant program. This employment-focused case management model has proven to be effective in helping refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency. In FY14, the program served 29,686 refugees, asylees, entrants, and special immigrant visa holders, and reports economic self-sufficiency rates

of approximately 76 percent for refugees at 180 days after arrival. Given the proven success of the program, the President's Budget proposes a \$22 million increase to the FY 2016 Matching Grant program to serve an additional 10,000 eligible individuals.

ORR also provides funds to state governments and private non-profit agencies to support social services including English language courses, employment services, case management, social adjustment services, and interpreter services. These funds are allocated to states based on a formula tied to the prior two years of arrival data that accounts for refugees' and other entrants' movements to other states after their initial resettlement.

Targeted Assistance grants are provided to states with qualifying counties that have high numbers of refugee arrivals. States are required by statute to pass on to counties that house significant refugee populations at least 95 percent of the funds awarded through these grants. Services provided by this program are generally designed to help refugees secure employment within one year or less of arrival.

ORR programs also support economic development activities. These programs focus on financial literacy, establishing credit, and matched savings in support of housing purchases, educational goals, car purchases essential to employment, and hundreds of business startups that in turn employ thousands.

ORR recognizes that many individuals resettling to the U.S., including refugees and other entrants, have experienced torture. For this reason, treatment and services are provided through

the Survivor of Torture Program to victims of torture regardless of immigration status. The program strives to provide culturally competent services and client-centered treatment plans that build upon individual strengths to restore dignity, enhance resilience, and rebuild lives. Given that increasingly recent arrivals are survivors of torture, ORR has made efforts to maximize service capacity and expand access to this program.

Data on successes in the ORR's programs

As mentioned, ORR programs and services assist refugees and other eligible populations to obtain employment and become self-sufficient. In FY 2014, over 3,120 refugees and other eligible populations enrolled in or completed the ORR Individual Development Account program, which has enabled them to spend over \$2 million toward buying new homes, starting businesses, or enrolling in educational courses, demonstrating their growing contribution to the U.S. economy. In addition, last year over 2,000 refugees were served in the microenterprise program. These services included business training; pre-loan and post-loan technical assistance; and providing financing to start, expand, or strengthen a business. These businesses owned by refugees and other humanitarian entrants created and retained 1,205 jobs.

Initiatives to improve and enhance services

The Administration is committed to improving and expanding ORR programs for our most vulnerable populations such as the elderly, single mothers, certain noncitizens in special immigrant status, and victims of trafficking and torture. In recent years, ORR has expanded

programs that provide long-term case management to these populations in order to facilitate more effective integration.

Recently, ORR expanded our Preferred Community Program, which supports the most vulnerable arriving populations with intensive, longer-term case management. These services are available in 120 locations and focus on ensuring paths to self-sufficiency for those with: medical conditions; single heads of households; the elderly; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender refugees.

ORR also created the Division of Refugee Health (DRH) to address issues of health and well-being that are vital to the successful integration of refugees and other ORR-eligible populations, many of whom have suffered significant physical hardship and had limited or no access to health care services during their period of flight and displacement. DRH focuses on providing technical assistance on medical screening guidelines, assessment and follow-up for contagious or communicable diseases, mental health awareness and linkages, suicide prevention, emergency preparedness, and other health and mental health initiatives.

ORR is also committed to supporting refugee youth, particularly through School Impact grants. Through the School Impact Program, ORR supports local school districts in which significant numbers of refugee and other eligible populations' children reside. The program grantees focus on: English as a Second Language, after-school tutorials for refugee students, cultural after-school activities, drop-out prevention programs, parental outreach and family community

involvement, interpreter services for parent-teacher meetings, aides working with refugee children, and bilingual counselors.

As a part of his November 2014 executive actions, the President established the White House Task Force on New Americans, a government-wide effort tasked with better integrating immigrants and refugees into American communities in three key areas: civically, economically, and linguistically. In line with its responsibilities as a member of this taskforce, ORR is engaged in efforts to promote community engagement and develop mainstream resources for refugees and other eligible populations. For example, ORR provides technical assistance grants to assist communities in developing greater awareness of and support for refugees and other eligible populations, since resettlement is greatly enhanced when local stakeholders and community residents are informed and involved.

As part of these efforts, ORR and the Corporation for National and Community Service identified eight new Welcoming Communities AmeriCorps programs that will assist local communities with the integration of refugee and other entrant populations. Through this partnership, AmeriCorps members will be placed with refugee resettlement agencies to expand support for refugees and other eligible populations in areas such as education, job readiness, housing, and financial literacy. Some programs will also play a critical role in helping communities as they build partnerships, develop and implement volunteer management systems, and support local immigrant integration plans. Using a client-centered approach, ORR's goal is to continue to build partnerships that will better serve refugees and other eligible ORR

populations who may otherwise not be considered within certain mainstream programs and initiatives.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to share with you the story of one refugee, Mohamedali Ali, and his family, who had to flee their native country of Eritrea. Mohamedali and his family spent four years in refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia. While in the camps, Mohamedali worked as a technician, nurse, translator, and a counselor. In 2013, he was resettled in Houston, Texas with his wife, Rahma, and their three children. Mohamedali and his family were enrolled in ORR's Matching Grant program, which provided cash assistance and employment services as well as other support his family needed in order to become self-sufficient. Because he had some work experience and was fluent in five languages, he was able to quickly secure his first job the same month he enrolled in our program. He found a job doing computer assembly. In order to improve her opportunities, Rahma enrolled in English as a Second Language classes and a driver's education program. She progressed well with her English, received her driver's license and now also works with her husband at the computer assembly company. Mohamedali and his family are doing very well and he plans to pursue his dream of a career in the medical field by enrolling in classes at Houston Community College's Certified Nursing Assistant program.

This couple's determination to succeed is representative of the determination I see in so many of the refugees who arrive in our country. Despite experiencing unimaginable hardships, violence, and oppression, many refugees arrive in this country not seeking handouts but opportunities to

improve themselves, give back to their communities, and achieve the American dream. HHS' programs assist refugees and other vulnerable populations in doing just that.

I welcome this Committee's interest in HHS' refugee resettlement programs. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the critical work we perform in assisting one of the most vulnerable populations. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Statement by Chuck Grassley
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications”
October 1, 2015

I appreciate the Chairman of this subcommittee for holding a hearing on this very important topic. The Immigration and Nationality Act requires that the President report to Congress regarding the “foreseeable number of refugees who will be in need of resettlement during the fiscal year.” Secretary Kerry consulted with members of this committee and provided some background on the President’s request. This hearing helps fulfill our statutory responsibility to review the President’s proposal.

The United States welcomes more refugees than the rest of the world’s countries combined. There’s no question that we will continue to play a critical role in helping those around the world who are suffering or are persecuted.

Nevertheless, the American people are very concerned about the role this country will play in solving the problems in the Middle East. The President's refugee proposal includes a plan to accept more than 10,000 refugees who are fleeing from Syria.

ISIS and other terrorist groups have made it abundantly clear that they will use the refugee crisis to try to enter the United States. And, it's becoming apparent that people in other countries are attempting to hide in the masses in order to enter Europe. Reports suggest that a vast number of those fleeing Syria are neither Syrian nor refugees. The International Organization for Migration reports that only 40% of those showing up at Europe's borders are Syrians. Some suggest that people from Iraq, Afghanistan, and sub-Saharan Africa are fleeing their homelands and taking advantage of the crisis.

If the Obama administration wants to bring in an additional ten thousand Syrians, it must present a concrete and foolproof plan to ensure that terrorists won't be able to enter the country. And, the administration needs to show that it has enlisted the help of other capable, affluent nations in the Middle East to deal with the crisis in Syria.

I have several questions for our witnesses, including how the administration will screen individuals for terrorist ties, and just as importantly, what it will do if it finds out an individual is a terrorist *after* that person has been granted refugee status.

Before agreeing to accept tens of thousands of Syrian refugees, the Obama administration must prove to the American people that it will take the necessary precautions to ensure that national security is a top priority, especially at a time when ruthless terrorist groups like ISIS are committed to finding ways to enter the United States and harm Americans.

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On the Hearing on the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program,
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
October 1, 2015**

The United Nations estimates that in 2014, there were almost 60 million refugees and internally displaced people around the globe. Not since World War II has the world faced such a refugee crisis. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we are turning our attention to our own capacity to assist and resettle refugees.

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has long benefitted from the flow of new arrivals, including people who have fled violence and war. In my home state of Vermont, I have seen how the admission of these refugees and asylum seekers – about 6,700 since 1989 – has revitalized and enriched our communities, resulting in the creation of new businesses, safer neighborhoods, and stronger schools. As they become small business owners, nurses, and soccer coaches, these new neighbors contribute to the wellbeing and vibrancy of our communities, and their culture enriches ours. Refugee resettlement is a challenging undertaking, but the benefits to our communities and our country can be so rewarding. In fact, a recent study has found that welcoming refugees has a positive, or at least a neutral, effect on a host community's economy and wages.

After September 11, 2001, we understandably slowed our efforts to resettle refugees while we improved our immigration processes and implemented tougher screening measures. Since then, we have been slowly returning to our historic high refugee admission numbers, which in some years involved the successful resettlement of more than 100,000 individuals.

The current crisis demands we do more -- now. We have a moral obligation to act and it is time that we again step forward and lead by example. As Pope Francis said on his historic visit to the United States last week, "We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal."

Our response to this global refugee crisis must be humane, whether we are responding to those fleeing uncontrolled gang violence in Central America or those fleeing civil war in Syria. I have been awed by the response of Syria's neighbors, like tiny Lebanon, which has now taken in more than one million refugees. In contrast, we have done everything to avoid taking refugees on our own border. We have tried to seal Mexico's southern border, effectively locking in mothers and children fleeing extreme violence. We have built a new detention facility, run by the private prison company Corrections Corporation of America, to lock up those who make it this far – at a cost of more than \$800,000 a day. The Pope was right to call on us to do better. We must treat these vulnerable families with the same compassion with which we want to be treated.

The United States has learned much in the 14 years since 9/11. We must apply that knowledge. We can and must be careful, but we can be more efficient. Our refugee resettlement program, including our community and faith-based partners, is a program of which we should be proud. Let us use that program to rise to the challenge before us and increase our refugee admission numbers. The time is now.

Opening Statement of Senator Dick Durbin
“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and
Security Implications.”
Immigration Subcommittee Hearing
October 1, 2015

We are in the midst of the worst refugee crisis on record, with almost 60 million people forcibly displaced from their homes.

The conflict in Syria is the epicenter of this crisis. We all remember the heartbreaking image of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the Mediterranean. The truth is that an entire generation of Syrian children is at risk. More than half of Syria’s 23 million people have been forced from their homes. More than four million Syrians are registered as refugees, including almost two million children. More than ten thousand Syrian children have been killed, and thousands are unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

These are not economic migrants, as some have claimed. They are refugees who are fleeing for their lives. The poet Warsan Shire, who is herself a refugee from Somalia, put it well when she wrote, “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”

The Syrian refugee crisis has placed a great strain on the front-line countries that are hosting millions of Syria refugees. The tiny country of Lebanon, with a population of 4.2 million, is hosting 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees, the most refugees per capita in the world. This is almost 30 percent of Lebanon’s population, the equivalent of the United States facing an influx of 100 million refugees.

The United States has a moral obligation to help Syrian refugees, but it is also in our national interest to restore stability in this critical region. We have taken some positive steps to address the crisis. The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees. Three years ago, I pushed the Administration to grant temporary protected status to Syrians. As a result, the United States is providing safe haven to hundreds of Syrian visitors who were in the country on temporary visas. And last year, after a hearing I held on the Syrian refugee crisis, the Administration issued exemptions to the material support bar which will make it easier for Syrian refugees to obtain refugee status.

But so far we have only accepted around 1600 Syrian refugees for resettlement, a paltry number that must increase dramatically. In May, I joined with Senator Klobuchar and 13 other Senators in asking the Administration to admit at least 65,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016. The Administration has now said that we will accept 10,000 Syrian refugees this fiscal year. That is a positive development, but we must do more. With the crisis worsening, Refugee Council USA, a nonpartisan coalition of the leading U.S. refugee organizations is now calling for the United States to resettle 200,000 refugees, including 100,000 Syrians. I agree.

This generation of Americans needs to live up to the example set by those who came before us. Our nation’s founders came to our shores to escape religious persecution, and the United States has a long tradition of providing safe haven to refugees. Following the international community’s tragic failure to shelter Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi genocide, the United States played a leadership role in establishing the international legal regime for the protection of

refugees. Since that time, the American people have generously welcomed millions of refugees fleeing war and totalitarian regimes. For example:

- After World War II, we accepted almost 400,000 Eastern Europeans.
- The Vietnam War led to us resettling almost 400,000 Vietnamese refugees.
- After Castro came to power, we accepted approximately 650,000 Cuban refugees.
- And we resettled more than 150,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia.

Just as they have during these previous crises, the American people are showing they're ready to welcome refugees into their communities. In fact, I've received several letters from Illinois residents who are prepared to host Syrian refugees in their homes.

Some who oppose refugee resettlement have argued that refugees are a fiscal burden. That's simply not true. According to a recent study by the Migration Policy Institute, refugees are more likely to be employed than the U.S. born population; and refugees' participation in public benefits programs declines sharply the longer they live in the U.S. A Texas A&M study found that it takes refugees a few years to establish themselves, but they then add more value to the economy each year than the entire original cost of resettling them. Here are some examples of refugees who have contributed to making America a stronger country: the late General John Shalikashvili; Sergey Brin, the cofounder of Google; and former Intel CEO Andrew Grove, the pioneer of the semiconductor industry. And then there's Steve Jobs, the son of a Syrian immigrant.

Unfortunately, some have engaged in scare tactics and fear mongering about refugees. One member of Congress even called the resettlement of Syrian refugees a "federally funded jihadi pipeline." That is an irresponsible and inaccurate claim. The reality is that refugees are the most carefully vetted of all travelers to the U.S., with extensive biometric, biographic, and intelligence checks involving numerous agencies.

Last month I received a classified briefing on the refugee resettlement program. I can't talk about the details of that briefing, but it gave me great confidence in our security screening. I agree with my colleague Lindsey Graham, who said, quote, "The risk of doing nothing about the Syrian refugee crisis is greater than the risk of taking vetted people."

If any member of Congress has doubts about our refugee resettlement program, they should ask for a classified briefing before making baseless allegations. And they should take the time to meet the Syrian refugees who are being resettled in our country.

Last month I met with four Syrian refugees settled in Chicago. Every one of them said they couldn't believe how welcoming the people in America are to them. That's who we are. That's what America is about.

Today, I'd like to introduce the members of this Subcommittee to Hussam Alroustom. Mr. Alroustom, please stand. Mr. Alroustom fled his home in Homs Syria in 2013 after his house was shelled by a missile from the Syrian Army. He moved into another house with 5 other families and that house was shelled and destroyed as well. He moved to another neighborhood but barrel bombs were being dropped there. Mr. Alroustom then fled Syria with his wife Suha and two children. After a long and difficult journey through the desert, Mr. Alroustom ended up

in Jordan, where he applied for refugee status. After a long process, he and his family came to the United States on June 16, 2015. Mr. Alroustom now works two jobs, as a mover during the day and a baker at night, in order to support his family.

Mr. Alroustom is not a terrorist. And he's not a fiscal drain on our country. We should feel proud that our country has welcomed Mr. Alroustom and his family. That is what our country's refugee resettlement program is all about. I'm sorry that some members of Congress don't understand that, but they will have a real fight on their hands if they break our country's historic commitment to welcoming refugees to our shores.

Senator Charles E. Schumer – Statement for the Record – October 1, 2015
“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications”

As Pope Francis pointed out last week in an address to Congress, the world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Over four million Syrians are fleeing their homeland to escape a brutal dictator, Bashar al-Assad, who has committed atrocities against tens of thousands of his own people – indiscriminately bombing villages, towns and cities full of innocent civilians in his fight against rebel groups, and cutting his people off from food, water, and electricity. It’s not just Syria. Across the world, refugees are fleeing persecution. Whether it’s Ukrainians displaced by Russian-backed separatist forces, persecuted Iranian religious minorities, Christians, Yazidis and others fleeing ISIL, Congolese escaping civil war, or others –tens of thousands of persecuted people are looking to the United States for help.

How should America respond? We must respond as we always have, with sagacity and clear-eyed generosity and compassion. As we have helped past refugees fleeing Communist repressing in Cuba, Vietnam and the former Soviet Union, so we must seek to help those now displaced by global calamities, genocide, war and brutal regimes. Annually, we resettle over half of all refugees referred by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – more than the other 29 resettlement countries combined – representing over 50 nationalities per year. We are by far the largest single donor to UNHCR, providing over \$1.28 billion in FY 2014. We have contributed over \$4 billion in international aid directly responding to the crisis in Syria. And we are now expanding our refugee program to welcome more and resettle them in our communities.

In order to be a humane and just nation, something that undergirds America’s international prestige and power, these are the things we must do. But to address the topic of today’s hearing, we must continue to do this without posing risks to our national security. To be clear, Congress long ago put in place a law prohibiting any immigrant – refugee, tourist, or worker – from entering the United States if that person has materially assisted a terrorist organization. As a result of this law, all immigrants but especially refugees undergo extensive national security and criminal background checks. Let’s not forget that, on average, it takes 18-24 months for a refugee to be resettled in the U.S. – that’s because they face a suite of intensive background checks multiple times throughout their application process.

Those checks are absolutely vital, but they do not prevent us from helping those who truly need and deserve refugee protections. We can do both. We can shield those fleeing persecution while maintaining the vigorous security checks and precautions we take when admitting people to our country.

Refugees add vitality to our communities and re-energize local economies. Many have heard me tell the success story of Utica, New York, where refugees from Bosnia, Belarus, Russia, Somalia, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam have played a pivotal role revitalizing the city by starting businesses, creating jobs and generating a virtuous economic and cultural cycle for that community.. There are cities across the country that have benefited in similar ways.

As we debate how to handle the refugee crisis we face today, we should all take stock of Pope Francis’ eloquent reminder that the yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time

will use for us. In this respect, we have an exceptional legacy. Here in America we welcome strangers seeking asylum; we accept, “the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” And as I have made clear, we can do so without compromising our national security.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Chuck Grassley (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Mr. Bartlett, in your testimony you state that two million Syrian refugees are currently in Turkey, over one million are in Lebanon, over 600,000 are in Jordan. Also, you say Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

And yet, according to Amnesty International, the Gulf states (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), as well as affluent Asian economies like Japan and South Korea, have accepted no Syrian refugees at all. Russia, which has now commenced military operations in Syria, has also offered zero resettlement spots to Syrian refugees.

1. What is the Department of State doing to convince other countries in the Middle East, especially affluent countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, to accept Syrian refugees?

Answer:

The United States continues to actively encourage countries in the Middle East and around the world to support refugees. Countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have taken in millions of Syrian refugees. Gulf countries have made significant monetary contributions in humanitarian aid.

None of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol and they have been cautious in

accepting Syrians in refugee status. GCC states have instead allowed some Syrians to enter and remain in their countries through granting work permits and extending residency permits. We continue to encourage them to find ways for additional Syrians to enter, particularly vulnerable Syrians, by increasing the number of residency and work permits available and increasing cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

We encourage all countries, including those in the Gulf, to fulfill all outstanding pledges, and encourage new financial contributions on a recurring annual basis through the UN system to avoid duplication. We were recently pleased to hear of the establishment of the King Salman Humanitarian Center and we look forward to coordinating humanitarian efforts with Saudi Arabia and other partners in the humanitarian response.

We also continue to encourage GCC states to follow up on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) September 13 Emergency Meeting in Jeddah, which focused on the Syrian refugee crisis. Specifically, we urge all OIC members to join the Refugee Convention as called for by OIC Secretary General Madani (over half of all OIC members, including all the Gulf countries, are not parties to that Convention), take in more refugees,

and adopt an OIC framework on refugees to promote cooperation between OIC members to help alleviate the refugee crisis in the Muslim world.

We also urge these countries to follow up on plans for an OIC ministerial to discuss and adopt a plan of action on refugee issues in OIC states.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Chuck Grassley (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Mr. Bartlett, in your testimony you state that two million Syrian refugees are currently in Turkey, over one million are in Lebanon, over 600,000 are in Jordan. Also, you say Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

And yet, according to Amnesty International, the Gulf states (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), as well as affluent Asian economies like Japan and South Korea, have accepted no Syrian refugees at all. Russia, which has now commenced military operations in Syria, has also offered zero resettlement spots to Syrian refugees.

2. Has the Department raised the issue of refugee resettlement with affluent Asian countries like Japan and South Korea?

Answer:

The Department has discussed and will continue to discuss refugee resettlement with countries around the world, including Japan and South Korea. Both countries participate in the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement hosted by UNHCR in Geneva. In addition, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration has provided technical expertise to both countries as they increase their resettlement programs.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

1. The draft report submitted to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees indicated that the Department of State would need approximately \$503.7 million to process and resettle 75,000 refugees. The final report indicated that the Department of State would need the same amount of money to process and resettle 85,000 refugees.

- a. How much will this increase cost?
- b. How much will it cost to admit the 100,000 refugees that the administration has targeted for Fiscal Year 2017?
- c. Does the State Department intend to ask Congress for additional funds? If so, how much, and when?

Answer:

The *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015: Report to the Congress* includes a table outlining the total funding available or estimated availabilities to support the program, including the appropriation from Congress, carryover funds, and refugee loan repayment funds, among others. The President's Budget Request to Congress for FY 2016 was \$442.7 million for the Admissions program and included funding for a ceiling of 75,000 refugees. The Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required to admit an additional number of refugees above the 75,000

included in the initial FY 2016 President's Request, and it may require additional resources. The President's FY 2017 Request is still being formulated and the Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required for the program in FY 2017.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

2. You testified at the hearing that the Department of State has an approximate 80% repayment rate on the loans provided to refugees for travel to the United States.
- a. What is the average loan amount?
 - b. What is the average default amount?
 - c. How much money has the Department of State failed to recover due to defaults on loans provided to refugees over the last ten years?

Answer:

Refugees traveling to the U.S. are offered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) interest-free travel loans to pay for the costs of their transportation from overseas to U.S. resettlement sites. The average IOM loan amount per refugee is \$1,200 and the average loan note, which includes loans for all members of a refugee family, is \$2,500. The average number of individuals per note is about 2.1.

Approximately 70 percent of all loan amounts are repaid within 5 years and 78 percent of loan amounts are repaid within 10 years. Neither IOM nor the resettlement agencies charge interest, penalties or fees to delinquent loans, nor have they ever initiated legal action through the courts

against any delinquent loan-holder. IOM is responsible for ensuring the financial accountability of the loan program and compliance with all applicable U.S. laws pertaining to debt collection. IOM loans are subject to credit reporting requirements. Refugees can request extensions or changes to payment schedules and terms, if facing hardship. In addition, refugee loans can be canceled based on specific criteria including death, disability, old age, and bankruptcy. A loan is considered to be in default and then is returned to IOM for collection if the loan has not been extended or modified and no payments have been received within four consecutive months. The average default amount is \$1,981.

For \$645 million in loans provided to refugees over the last ten years, \$137 million (or 21 percent) is currently in default status. IOM continues to actively pursue rehabilitation and repayment of these loans including skip tracing, outbound calling, and changing payment schedules and terms.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

3. According to data available from the Department of State Refugee Processing Center's databases, out of the 1,670 refugees admitted from Syria during Fiscal Year 2015, 29 refugees, or 1.7%, were Christians. Out of the 10,000 refugees from Syria that the administration says it will resettle in Fiscal Year 2016, do you expect a similar percentage of Christians to be admitted to the United States?

Answer:

The United States is committed to assisting people of all ethnicities, religions and nationalities who are fleeing persecution, violence, and other causes of displacement. With regard to resettlement, our emphasis is on admitting the most vulnerable individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution based on one of the five protected grounds (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, and membership in a particular social group) under U.S. law, in a manner that is consistent with U.S. national security.

Since 2011, the United States has admitted over 2,200 Syrian refugees, four percent of whom are members of religious minorities, half of which were Christians. Pre-war demographics indicated that Christians made up around 10 percent of the population in Syria, or approximately 1.8

million Christians. It is unclear how many Christians have left the country, however it is estimated that Christians comprise far fewer than 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population. Based on this data, we expect a similar percentage of Syrian Christians admitted in FY 2016, although it could increase somewhat given planned resumption of refugee processing in Lebanon. (We believe Syrian Christians are more likely to seek refuge in Lebanon than other countries in the region.)

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

4. How many refugees from Syria do you anticipate will be admitted to the United States over the next five fiscal years through the Refugee Admissions Program?

Answer:

As Secretary Kerry announced in September, the United States would accept at least 85,000 refugees from around the world in Fiscal Year 2016 and at least 100,000 the following year. Of those accepted in 2016, at least 10,000 will be from Syria. He also stated we would be working hard to explore whether we could do more. This step is keeping with America's best tradition as a beacon of hope to those fleeing violence and persecution and a signal of solidarity to our allies and partners around the world. While we do not establish refugee admission targets by nationality five years out due to the emergency nature of refugee crises, in consultation with Congress we will continue to explore ways to increase those figures while maintaining robust security and screening protocols.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#5)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

5. Are members of the public able to attend quarterly consultations with state and local officials regarding refugee resettlement efforts?

Answer:

The Department of State requires resettlement agencies' local affiliates to convene quarterly community consultations with stakeholders in areas of resettlement. In some areas, the State Refugee Coordinator may convene the required quarterly meetings. Through these consultations and other means, the affiliates are able to continually gauge the capacity of the community for refugee resettlement. While the program is operated under federal authority, the resettlement agencies and the Department of State consider carefully the input received from its state and local stakeholders when determining the feasibility and capacity of a refugee resettlement program. Attendance at quarterly meetings is determined locally by meeting organizers.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#6)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

6. When is the last time that the Department of State conducted a financial audit of the private contractors with which it works to provide refugee resettlement services?

Answer:

All Department of State cooperative agreements with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide refugee resettlement services require annual independent financial audits under the provisions of the Federal Grant Regulations (2 CFR Part 200 Subpart F –Audit Requirements). Accordingly, each NGO is audited annually.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Can you confirm the following:

- a. That United States government officials have no access to civilian local or municipal records within the sovereign territory of Syria?
- b. That United States government officials have no access to civilian national records within the sovereign territory of Syria?

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process, records, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Has the Assad government provided any assistance to help identify Syrian nationals who are asserting refugee status, either by supplying records or offering to verify claims made by alleged Syrian refugees? If the answer is yes, please provide additional details.

Answer:

We have not sought assistance from the Asad regime for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. The Asad government long ago lost legitimacy and would not be a trusted partner in the screening process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Given the likelihood that the Assad government favors the refugee flow (since any legitimate Syrian nationals leaving Syria at this time are likely either opponents of the Assad government or ISIS operatives taking advantage of the refugee flow), would you acknowledge that the Assad government may have an incentive to allow an uncontrolled, unconditional exodus of Syrian nationals from Syria at this time?

Answer:

We believe the primary driver of departure from Syria for the nearly 4.3 million refugees is the Asad regime's nearly five year campaign of terror, barrel bombs, and wanton destruction as well as violence from extremist armed groups. The ongoing conflict in Syria and the destabilizing impact on the broader region and beyond are primary drivers of violent extremism.

Until the conflict in Syria is resolved through a political transition, and the brutality of the Asad regime ends, the country will continue to attract violent extremists and drive away moderates. As we continue to strengthen the international community's counterterrorism efforts, it is important to

properly identify where the risk is greatest to ensure resources are most effectively employed to address the burgeoning risk of violent extremism and terrorism.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Have any other Middle Eastern or European governments provided any assistance to help identify Syrian nationals who are asserting refugee status, either by supplying records or offering to verify claims made by alleged Syrian refugees? If the answer is yes, please provide additional details.

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process, records, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#5)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Is it fair to state that, if an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee, and asserts to be a Syrian national, but offers no objective or verifiable records or other information that assures identity or nationality, and provides no indication during his or her interview that their story is fabricated, the United States government will accept that refugee's claim that he or she is a Syrian national, without further verification? If the answer is yes, please explain the justification for this position.

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process, verification of nationality, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#6)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Is it fair to state that, if an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee, but offers no objective or verifiable records or other information that assures identity or nationality, and provides no indication during his or her interview that their story is fabricated, and the individual's offered identity does trigger a derogatory hit on any of the security databases that are used to determine terrorist or criminal activity, the United States government will consider that individual to not be a security risk? If the answer is yes, please explain the justification for this position.

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the interview process, records, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#7)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

If an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee as part of this flow out of Syria, but is identified as (or admits to being) a citizen of a nation other than Syria, is their application for refugee status automatically denied? If the answer is no, please provide a detailed explanation as to why such applications are not automatically denied.

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the interview process, verification of nationality, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#8)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Please explain what provision of federal law (if any) would prevent United States officials who are involved in reviewing refugee applications from only approving applications of individuals who can demonstrate Syrian citizenship and identity.

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the interview process, verification of nationality, and USCIS approvals and denials.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#9)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Please explain how it is not a massive national security risk to admit individuals to the United States who purport to be Syrian national refugees but can offer no objective or verifiable records or other information to establish their identity or nationality.

Answer:

The security screening process for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, including DHS's Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, reflects extensive experience screening out misrepresentations of identity and nationality.

All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo the most intensive level of security screening of any category of traveler to the United States involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense, in order to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country.

These safeguards include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-depth interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States. The classified details of the refugee security screening process are regularly shared with relevant congressional committees.

Any refugee, including Syrians, may only be admitted to the United States after DHS' Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) receives the security checks run by the intelligence and law enforcement communities and all issues are resolved. Only then can USCIS affirmatively determine a refugee is admissible to the United States.

The burden of proof in the refugee application process is on the refugee – the refugee must show he or she qualifies for refugee status. U.S. law and regulations require that applicants provide DHS/USCIS with information that enables our law enforcement and intelligence communities to confirm their identity and assess whether they present a security risk. A lack of derogatory information on an applicant is not in and of itself sufficient evidence to pass the security clearance. If DHS' expert screeners

are not satisfied with the information provided, the applicant will not be permitted to travel to the United States.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening. The screening process is multi-layered and recurrent and involves a rigorous security review. We check extensively against law enforcement and intelligence community holdings—and those holdings are regularly updated and enhanced to ensure we have the most up-to-date and accurate information possible.

DHS has full discretion to deny admission to any refugee including on national security grounds and has done so in numerous cases. DHS' decisions are guided by the key principle directed by the President and affirmed throughout the U.S. government – that the safety and security of the American people must always come first.

For additional details regarding the security screening process, I refer you to DHS.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#10)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

At last week's hearing, your testimony and the testimony of other witnesses made it clear that the United States government's ability to screen the Syrian refugee flow for potential terrorism or national security threats depends almost entirely on their being flagged in an existing domestic or international terrorism or criminal database. While this allays some concerns, it does not address the fundamental reality of the security threat currently posed by ISIS in Syria, given that ISIS is drawing an abundance of recruits who may be local and not previously involved in domestic or international terrorism.

Does the United States government have any way to learn of an individual's possible affiliation with ISIS (or any other terrorist organization) in the absence of either some derogatory database hit or some indication in the course of interviews that the person is not credible?

Answer:

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has a long history of safely admitting refugees from violent conflicts, including where intelligence holdings are limited, and the USRAP has long been mindful of threats posed by al-Qaeda and ISIL. That is precisely why the screening process in place for all refugees, including Syrians, is so robust.

All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo the most intensive level of security screening of any category of traveler to the United States involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense, in order to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country.

These safeguards include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-depth interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States. The classified details of the refugee security screening process are regularly shared with relevant congressional committees.

The burden of proof in the refugee application process is on the refugee – the refugee must show he or she qualifies for refugee status. U.S. law and regulations require that applicants provide DHS/USCIS with information that enables our law enforcement and intelligence communities to confirm their identity and assess whether they present a security risk. A lack of derogatory information on an applicant is not in and of itself

sufficient evidence to pass the security clearance. If DHS' expert screeners are not satisfied with the information provided, the applicant will not be permitted to travel to the United States.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening. The screening process is multi-layered and recurrent and involves a rigorous security review. We check extensively against law enforcement and intelligence community holdings—and those holdings are regularly updated and enhanced to ensure we have the most up-to-date and accurate information possible.

Any refugee, including Syrian, may only be admitted to the United States after DHS' Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) receives the security checks run by the intelligence and law enforcement communities and all issues are resolved. Only then can USCIS affirmatively determine a refugee is admissible to the United States.

DHS has full discretion to deny admission to any refugee including on national security grounds and has done so in numerous cases. DHS' decisions are guided by the key principle directed by the President and affirmed throughout the U.S. government – that the safety and security of the American people must always come first.

For additional details regarding the security screening process, I refer you to DHS.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#11)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

At last week's hearing, you testified that, as of the date of the hearing, the United States had contributed approximately \$14.5 billion in taxpayer-subsidized monetary aid to the Syrian refugee effort.

Please provide the following information:

- a. Confirmation as to whether that \$14.5 billion amount was the total amount of expenditures for the Syrian refugee effort for Fiscal Year 2015, and, if not what that total amount is for Fiscal Year 2015.
- b. The agency's or agencies' account or accounts from which that funding has been drawn.
- c. The complete list of international organizations and/or relief organizations that have received any amount of this funding.
- d. What sort of accounting, if any, these international organizations and/or relief organizations must supply to the United States government to ensure proper use of the funding.
- e. What restrictions, if any, the United States government has placed on the international organizations and/or relief organizations that are using this funding.

Answer:

- a. Since the start of the crisis, the U.S. government has provided over \$4.5 billion in humanitarian funding to respond to the Syria crisis.
- b. Of the more than \$4.5 billion, over \$1.6 billion was provided in FY 2015. Of this \$1.6 billion in FY 2015, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) provided over \$752 million in Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA); USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) provided over \$579 million in International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Title II funding; and USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) over \$296 million in IDA. This assistance helped provide shelter, access to clean water, life-saving emergency medical care, food, protection, and other necessities to millions of Syrian refugees and conflict victims. U.S. assistance also encouraged other nations to step up and contribute to international relief efforts as well.
- c. Recipients of U.S. government funding in FY 2015 to address the Syria humanitarian crisis are: The World Food Program, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the

International Organization for Migration, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the International Labor Organization, and numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

d. United Nations and other international organizations must implement and comply with International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and other internationally recognized generally accepted auditing standards for financial accounting and reporting. Contribution agreements, including grants, require UN and other international organizations to carry out the funded activities in accordance with the organizations' established policies and procedures, and that all program and financial reports concerning funded activities be provided to donors as well as copies of annual external audit reports. Organizations must provide programmatic updates, financial reporting, and annual and/or final reports. UN organizations must maintain such financial records for at least three years after the recipient's final disbursement of funds under the award. All Department of State and

USAID cooperative agreements and grants with NGOs include specific terms and conditions for carrying out the funded activities and require periodic financial and program reporting and annual independent financial audits under the provisions of the Federal Grant Regulations (2 CFR Part 200).

e. All contributions, grants, and cooperative agreements contain language that recipients take reasonable efforts to ensure that no U.S. funding is used to provide support to individuals or entities associated with terrorism. U.S. contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East are conditioned on the Agency taking “all possible measures” to ensure that no U.S. funding supports terrorists or supporters of terrorism, as required by section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act, as amended.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#12)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

At last week's hearing, it was expressed that the United States was under a moral obligation to receive unspecified thousands of Syrian refugees, in large part because other nations (mostly, European and Middle Eastern nations) were apparently bearing the brunt of receipt of these refugees. It was suggested that the United States needs to do its part in accepting some percentage of these refugees because of the volume of refugees and the negative impact that volume is having on the region.

Please provide the following information regarding the recent unaccompanied alien child (UAC) influx at the U.S.-Mexico border:

- a. How many UAC were received by European Union (EU) nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).
- b. How much financial aid or support EU nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).
- c. How many UAC were received by Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).
- d. How much financial aid or support Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).

Answer:

The United States did not receive bilateral assistance from other nations to respond to the increased number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving to the United States or to develop and implement the Central American Minors program.

Other nations may offer support to the region to respond to the displacement of unaccompanied minors through bilateral assistance, assistance to international organizations, and/or funding to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The European Union (EU) has provided funding to UNHCR for Children of Peace programs in Guatemala and Mexico. In addition, many donors, including Asian and EU countries, support UNHCR and IOM through funding that is not earmarked to particular populations to allow them the needed flexibility to respond to crises as they occur and develop.

We are not aware of unaccompanied refugee minors from Latin America resettled to EU, Central Asian, or Middle Eastern nations.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#13)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Are you aware of whether the United States has raised the issue of acceptance of Syrian refugees with either the government of the People's Republic of China or the government of the Russian Federation?

Answer:

The U.S. government has a multi-pronged approach to engaging with our overseas partners regarding the Syria conflict, including refugee-related matters. In this context, the U.S. government engages regularly with the international community, including the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China. In addition, we are working in collaboration with like-minded countries regarding the refugee and migration crisis stemming from the Syria civil war and helping the international community develop an effective humanitarian response. We continue to urge all countries to treat refugees with dignity and respect, and to uphold their human rights.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#14)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Given that the Russian Federation now has a heavy combat role in Syria (and is theoretically contributing to the refugee outflow as a result of its military operations), should the Russian Federation have a greater role in the acceptance of Syrian refugees?

Answer:

Russia's expanded military presence in Syria has contributed to increased displacement in Syria since October. As various U.S. officials have repeatedly told their Russian counterparts, attempting to end the civil war by military action will only cause greater violence and create further displacement, human casualties, human suffering, and destruction of institutions and public services. Furthermore, Russia's presence in Syria is prolonging Asad's rule, which only serves to exacerbate the refugee crisis and attract more fighters to the ISIL cause. As we have long held, there is no military solution to the civil war in Syria. Until the conflict in Syria is resolved through a political transition, and the brutality of the Asad regime ends, refugees will continue to flee from both the Asad regime's brutality

and ISIL. This is why it is so critical that we keep the momentum of the International Syria Support Group and to convene Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices and in accordance with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

We are aware that there are several thousand Syrian refugees currently residing in, or transiting through, Russia. We continue to urge all countries to treat refugees with dignity and respect, and to uphold their human rights.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#15)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

In conversations with congressional staff, it has emerged that the Department of State is defending its low number of admissions for Syrian Christian refugees on the ground that most Syrian Christian refugees have fled directly to Lebanon, and that the United States embassy in Beirut lacks the physical, personnel, or resource capacity to process refugees in Lebanon.

Please provide a more detailed explanation about the Department of State's physical, personnel, and resource capacity limitations at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and U.S. consulates in Lebanon.

Answer:

Due to security conditions and space constraints at Embassy Beirut, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has not been able to conduct refugee admission interviews since September 2014. We have a path to resolving those challenges and plan to resume refugee interviews in early 2016. Our goal is to admit 1,000 refugees from Lebanon in FY 2016, including a large number of Syrians.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Ted Cruz (#16)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What additional Department of State resources can be leveraged in order to facilitate or expand the processing of Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon and/or elsewhere in the region?

Answer:

The safety and treatment of members of religious and ethnic minorities in the region are issues of long-standing concern for the Department.

Along with our partners, we are taking steps to improve the capacity of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program to meet the increased admissions targets in the coming years and to ensure all affected populations, including those from religious minorities, have access to the program.

We plan to resume refugee admissions processing in Lebanon in early 2016, which will include Syrian Christian referrals.

We are also working with the UN and other organizations to establish a P-1 (individual referral) program for extremely vulnerable women and

girls from religious minorities, including Yazidis in northern Iraq. We plan to commence the identification process this month and begin interviewing cases in the January-February timeframe.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator David Vitter (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Background: You told ABC News, “One of the fundamental principles of our country is that we care about others. We will help others.” You also said every refugee is vetted through an “intense” system. In fact, PRM Assistant Secretary Anne C. Richard listed as a “Fiscal Year 2014 Accomplishment” that “PRM, DHS, and law enforcement and intelligence agencies successfully protected the refugee admissions program from infiltration by bad actors.” However, Chairman Sessions mentioned during this October 1, 2015, hearing that FBI Assistant Director of Counterterrorism Michael Steinbach on February 11, 2015, before the House Committee on Homeland Security, expressed significant concerns with screening Syrian refugees. Steinbach testified, “The concern in Syria is that we don’t have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet. . . . the concern is we would be vetting databases that don’t hold information on those individuals. . . . You’re talking about a country that is a failed state. That is, does not have any infrastructure . . . so all of the datasets – the police, the intel services – that normally you would go to seek information don’t exist.” However, you testified, “I can assure you, on our side, there will be no shortcuts on security. There will be no shortcuts on medical screening. There will be no shortcuts on processing. . . . There will be no shortcuts on our responsibilities to the American people.”

- a. Is FBI’s Assistant Director of Counterterrorism incorrect? Do we have systems in place on the ground in Syria to collect enough information to properly screen refugees?
- b. Approximately how many hours of the 18-to-24-month admission process is a U.S. official actively working on vetting a particular individual?
- c. How can PRM be so confident this intense vetting process completely eliminated the threat of ISIS infiltration in the Syrian Refugee

program in 2014?

- d. Does PRM have the same absolute confidence it will prevent ISIS terrorists from infiltrating the refugee program indefinitely?
- e. What is the foundation for this assertion?
- f. What additional resources do you have to meet this new ceiling of 85,000?
- g. What sacrifices will you be forced to make to meet this new ceiling, and won't that negatively affect your assurances of national security?

Answer:

The Administration remains deeply committed to safeguarding the American people while providing refuge to the world's most vulnerable. The Administration made the decision to participate in the global effort to resettle Syrian refugees only after concluding that we could do so safely and consistent with U.S. national security. This remains our guiding principle.

President Obama and Secretary Kerry are determined to ensure that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) meets the highest security standards. This Administration has taken a number of steps in recent years to further intensify our already rigorous refugee screening. The U.S. government screens refugees while they are still overseas, long before they are potentially admitted to the United States, in a process that is intensive and deliberate.

The USRAP has a long history of safely admitting refugees from violent conflicts, and the USRAP has long been mindful of threats posed by al-Qaeda and ISIL. That is precisely why the screening process in place for all refugees, including Syrians, is so robust.

All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo the most intensive level of security screening of any category of traveler to the United States involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense, in order to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country.

These safeguards include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-depth interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States. (The classified details of the refugee security screening process are regularly shared with relevant Congressional Committees.)

The burden of proof in the refugee application process is on the refugee – the refugee must show he or she qualifies for refugee status. U.S.

law and regulations requires that each applicant provides DHS/USCIS with information that better enables our law enforcement and intelligence communities to confirm their identity and assess whether they present a security risk to the country. If DHS' highly trained Refugee Corps officers are not satisfied with the information provided, the applicant will not be permitted to travel to the United States. A lack of derogatory information on an applicant is not in and of itself sufficient evidence to pass the security clearance.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening. The screening process is multi-layered and recurrent and involves a rigorous security review. We check extensively against law enforcement and intelligence community holdings—and those holdings are regularly updated and enhanced to ensure we have the most current and accurate information possible.

DHS has full discretion to deny admission to any refugee including on national security grounds and has done so in numerous cases. DHS' decisions are guided by the key principle directed by the President and affirmed throughout the U.S. government – that the safety and security of the American people must always come first.

All refugees, including Syrians, may only be admitted to the U.S. after DHS/USCIS receives the security checks undertaken by the intelligence and law enforcement communities and all issues are resolved. Only then does DHS/USCIS affirmatively determine they are admissible to the U.S.

While the U.S. Department of State manages the USRAP, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security manages the federal interagency screening process and only DHS has the authority to grant refugee admission on an individual basis. For additional questions regarding the screening process, we would refer you to DHS.

For additional information on the refugee resettlement process you may wish to consult DHS' detailed guide to the process at the following link: *<http://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>*.

The Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required to admit additional refugees above the 75,000 included in the FY 2016 President's Request.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Amy Klobuchar (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

1. Questions for Mr. Bartlett, Ms. Strack, Mr. Emrich

How extensive would you say our security screenings for refugee admissions are in comparison to the security screenings provided to other groups of people entering the United States?

Are refugees among the most carefully vetted of all travelers to the United States?

Answer:

All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo the most intensive level of security screening of any category of traveler to the United States involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense, in order to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country.

These safeguards include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-person overseas interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual

circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States. The classified details of the refugee security screening process are regularly shared with relevant Congressional Committees.

All refugees, including Syrians, may only be admitted to the U.S. after DHS/USCIS receives the security checks undertaken by the intelligence and law enforcement communities and all issues are resolved. Only if DHS/USCIS affirmatively determines refugees are admissible are they allowed to travel to the United States.

The burden of proof in the refugee application process is on the refugee – the refugee must show he or she qualifies for refugee status. U.S. law and regulations require that each applicant provides DHS/USCIS with information that better enables our law enforcement and intelligence communities to confirm their identity and assess whether they present a security risk to the country. If DHS' highly trained Refugee Corps officers are not satisfied with the information provided, the applicant will not be permitted to travel to the United States. A lack of derogatory information on an applicant is not in and of itself sufficient evidence to pass the security clearance.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening. The screening process is multi-layered and recurrent, and involves a rigorous security review. We check extensively against law enforcement and intelligence community holdings—and those holdings are regularly updated and enhanced to ensure we have the most up-to-date and accurate information possible.

Our highest priority is the protection of the American people. We are committed to maintaining the integrity of the refugee vetting process even as we fulfill our moral responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance in the face of this historic refugee crisis.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Could screenings be better timed to avoid needless duplication and delay?

As several of the witnesses discuss in their testimony, applicants for resettlement in the United States go through a number of different screenings. As I understand it, these screenings generally have a limited validity period. If a certain amount of time has passed since the screening and an applicant has not resettled in the United States, the screening expires and the applicant has to start over. It is possible that a refugee could be delayed through no fault of her own if one screening expires before another can be completed, and the refugee has to endure the hassle, the expense, and the delay associated with completing the same screening twice. In some cases, an entire family could have their screenings expire while they wait for one family member to get final approval.

- a. This question is for whoever can speak to the issue. It may be a few of you. Is the Administration considering ways to better time the resettlement application process to ensure that applicants do not have to needlessly go through the same screenings multiple times?
- b. This seems like an area where the resettlement process could be made more efficient without any cost in terms of security. I would like to work with you on this. Would you keep me updated?

Answer:

The Administration continues to identify efficiency measures to streamline refugee admissions processing while still upholding rigorous security vetting requirements. Prior to travel, refugees undergo a wide range

of security checks and need to clear a medical exam. Each of these checks has different validity periods, and some checks are initiated at different time periods throughout the process. The Administration is reviewing the end-to-end processing workflow to identify where processing can be made more efficient. We are also working to develop more rigorous data analytics to guide when checks should be re-requested to try to maximize the potential for an approved, cleared refugee to travel to the United State before another check expires.

We appreciate your interest and will keep Congress apprised of improvements to the refugee admissions process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What happens when an entire family is delayed because a single family member has not been approved?

As you know, families frequently apply to resettle together. For a family to be accepted, each member must be screened and approved. I have heard concerns that, as a result, entire families will often be stalled because a single family member's application has gotten delayed.

- a. How often does that kind of thing happen—where a family is held up because of a single family member or maybe two family members?
- b. Do you have a process for expediting consideration of particular applicants when clearing one applicant would allow an entire family to move forward? Can you describe that process? How often do you use it?

It seems to me that, if an entire family is delayed because of a single family member, the family might want to know what is going on. Then the family could choose whether to continue their application as a group or to let the approved members of the family move forward and leave the delayed member to follow them later.

- c. Do you inform families when the whole family has been stalled because the application of a particular family member has been delayed?
- d. If not, would you be willing to consider doing so?

Answer:

The Administration recognizes the challenges that families face when their cases are delayed. When a case is delayed due to a single family member, it is most commonly due to potential concerns related to the security vetting checks for the family member. In this scenario, a case cannot move forward to travel until the Department of Homeland Security makes a final adjudication on the case, including the security checks. If there is a negative vetting determination made for one member of the family, the case for the entire family is closed and no one in the family can travel to the United States as a refugee.

For cases with urgent protection needs, there is a process for expediting the final adjudication of the case, including the disposition of the security checks. However, if the final determination is a denial for even one individual on a case, the denial will apply to all members of a case.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What did you learn in Irbil about the treatment of Iraqi religious minorities?

Mr. Bartlett, as you likely know, I recently led a letter to Secretary Kerry concerning the protection of Iraqi religious minorities and the need to improve Iraqi refugee processing times. In particular, my colleagues and I requested Secretary Kerry to designate a Priority Two (P2) category for the persecuted religious minorities in Iraq. Further, we asked the State Department to accelerate processing times by: 1) doubling the number of personnel tasked with processing Iraqi refugees; 2) working with DHS to explore videoconferencing capabilities for interviewing refugees; 3) identifying non-governmental organizations to work with the U.S. Embassy to identify and screen religious minorities seeking in-country refugee assistance; and 4) establishing a facility in Irbil where refugee applicants can be processed.

I am aware that you traveled to Irbil a few weeks ago to meet with international organizations and explore options to address the overwhelming number of refugees.

- a. What were the major lessons or points you took away from this trip?

Answer:

Following my trip to Erbil, we moved forward in working with the UN and other organizations to establish a P-1 (individual referral) program for a small number of extremely vulnerable women and girls from religious minorities, including Yezidis in northern Iraq. We plan to commence the

identification process this month and begin interviewing cases in the January-February timeframe. We plan to have quarterly interview teams in Erbil throughout 2016.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

How many IACs are stuck in limbo, and how can that be resolved?

As you know, applicants for resettlement go through a screening known as the Interagency Check, or IAC. This process is in addition to a number of other biographic and biometric checks that applicants have to undergo. My understanding is that sometimes IACs are, at least initially, inconclusive. Applicants get back a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision”—meaning they have been neither approved nor denied. I have heard concerns that applicants who have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” are left in limbo and not given a chance to clear up whatever ambiguity led to them receiving an inconclusive check.

- a. As of today, how many applicants for resettlement have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” but not yet had their cases resolved?
- b. Do you give applicants the opportunity to provide information you need to move their cases from inconclusive to resolved?
- c. Would you look into whether more can be done to let resettlement applicants help clarify any ambiguities in their checks—provided they can do so without accessing classified materials?

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and

is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process and USCIS approvals and denials.

Senate Committee on Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
Questions for the Record

**“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications”**

HHS Witness: Robert Carey

October 1, 2015

The Honorable Jeff Sessions

- Question 1: The draft report submitted to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees indicated that the Office of Refugee Resettlement would need approximately \$652.6 million in funding to provide resettlement services to 75,000 refugees. The final report indicated that the office of Refugee Resettlement would need the same amount of money to process and resettle 85,000 refugees.**
- a. How much will this increase cost?**
 - b. How much will it cost to provide resettlement services to the 100,000 refugees that the administration has targeted for Fiscal Year 2017?**
 - c. Does the Office of Refugee Resettlement intend to ask Congress for additional funds? If so, how much, and when?**

Response: In light of the global displacement crisis, the Administration plans to admit 85,000 refugees in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, 15,000 more than in FY 2015. We had communicated prior to the enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 that the President’s FY 2016 Budget request for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance account, which included a contingency fund, in combination with carryover funds, would be sufficient to support the increase in refugee admissions; higher projected levels of other entrants; and Unaccompanied Children program costs (assuming some margin to accommodate potential costs above FY 2015).

Regarding the budget for FY 2017, as the refugee situation continues to evolve, the Administration is assessing our capacity and resource needs. While serving more refugees will require additional resources for the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) refugee programs, HHS is still evaluating those needs.

- Question 2: Please list all federal and state benefits (by state) for which a refugee is eligible to receive after admission to the United States.**

Response: Under federal law, refugees residing in the United States are eligible for federal public benefits to the same extent as citizens subject to certain limitations. In all states, refugees

may be eligible for federal and federal/state cash assistance programs, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) if they meet program eligibility criteria. Refugees who are determined not eligible for SSI or TANF are eligible for ORR-funded Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) for up to eight months after arrival. Typically ORR funds these programs through the state, however if a state has decided it does not wish to administer the program, ORR funding is passed through a private agency as part of a Wilson Fish program.¹ Some refugees participate in the ORR Matching Grant Program (MG) as an alternative to public cash assistance programs. This program provides housing, assistance with job placement, employment readiness, transportation, and case management to assist the refugee to reach self-sufficiency within 120-180 days. Self-sufficiency is defined as having income sufficient to be ineligible for public cash assistance. Refugees in all states may also be eligible for federal and federal/state health insurance programs, including Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Refugees who are determined not eligible for Medicaid or CHIP are eligible for ORR-funded Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for up to eight months after arrival.

Refugees can access federal employment-related services including the ORR Refugee Social Services Program (RSS) and the ORR Targeted Assistance Program (TAG). RSS and TAG are available for up to five years and provide employment services, job training and preparation, assistance with job search, placement and retention, English language and vocational training, skills recertification, job-related day care, job-related transportation, translation and interpreter services, and case management.

Because under federal law refugees residing in the United States are eligible for federal public benefits to the same extent as citizens subject to certain limitations, refugees in all states may also be eligible for federal nutritional assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps. Housing-related assistance is available through federal housing programs provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program provided by HHS. The U.S. Department of Education provides educational assistance through Federal Student Aid programs including grants, loans, and work-study programs.

State and local benefits and services vary by location and may include state-funded general assistance for refugees who do not qualify for federal benefits.

Despite experiencing unimaginable hardships, violence, and oppression, refugees arrive in this country seeking opportunities, rather than handouts, to re-establish their self-sufficiency and to become productive, integrated members of their communities. HHS' programs assist refugees and other vulnerable populations in doing just that.

Question 3: What is the estimated cost associated for admitting and resettling a single refugee over the average refugee's lifespan, including all federal benefits?

¹ Wyoming is the only state that does not have a refugee resettlement program. Therefore, RMA, RCA, RSS and TAG are not provided in that state. However, in instances when states withdraw from the refugee resettlement program, a Wilson Fish program may replace the state administered program.

Response: ORR programs serve a wide variety of individuals, from the very young to the very old; those with little formal education to those with advanced degrees; vulnerable populations who may be fleeing immediate violence to those who have been living in refugee camps for generations. Cash and medical assistance are administered at the state level and vary significantly from state to state. Cash assistance levels for the RCA Program are set at the level of assistance applicable to a family of that size in the state's TANF program. For instance, in Texas a refugee family of three would receive \$236 per month in cash assistance in TANF, where a family of three in Ohio would receive \$450 per month. Costs can also vary considerably based on individual refugees' needs. For example, one refugee may quickly find employment and only access one month of cash assistance, while another may take longer to secure employment and may need to access all eight months of assistance to which they are eligible. In addition, refugees are eligible for social services for up to five years, though the actual length of time most refugees access social services is much shorter. In FY 2014, 47 percent of refugees enrolled in social services programs were employed.²

Refugees are required to apply for lawful permanent resident status after they have been in the United States for one year and are eligible to apply for citizenship after they have been in permanent resident status in for a certain period (generally five years). Upon gaining citizenship, they would not be eligible for ORR services, but would be eligible for any federal benefits under the same terms as are applicable to citizens.

Question 4: What is the average income of a refugee admitted to the United States?

Response: At the time of their admission to the U.S., refugees generally have very limited income, or more commonly, no income at all. Most refugees are being referred from UNHCR to the program, and many come from refugee camps (30 percent) or large urban areas (50 percent), where, because of their status, prospects for working were minimal³. Initial access to time-limited public assistance programs combined with the refugees' own skills, talents, and resourcefulness put them on a path to self-sufficiency. In FY 2014, 76 percent of the 20,888 individuals reaching the end of their 180 day Matching Grant Program service period were determined to be economically self-sufficient through employment. In FY14, 47 percent of refugees enrolled in social services programs were employed. Refugees contribute to the communities into which they are resettled in vast and myriad ways – adding their unique hallmark to the diverse patchwork of our cities and towns and transforming the U.S. over the past 30 years. Refugees have contributed to the revitalization of entire cities such as Clarkston, GA; Lewiston, ME; and Utica, NY – opening businesses, buying homes, raising families, and becoming key members of the community.

² The Annual Outcome Goal Plans and Government Performance and Results Act report

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4b0e4cba.html>

Question 5: What types of retirement support programs, including medical care, do elderly refugees receive?

Response: Under federal law, elderly, blind, or disabled persons, including refugees who have limited income and resources, may access Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which provides cash assistance. For medical care, elderly and retired refugees may access Medicaid, RMA, or purchase health insurance on the Health Insurance Marketplace. Newly-arrived refugees would not be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits based on earnings from the country or countries they left, but once employed in the United States would be earning credits toward possible future eligibility for Social Security and Medicare (at age 65 and older).

Question 6: What percentage of refugees are currently participating in at least one means-tested federal or state program?

Response: Under federal law, refugees are eligible for federal public benefits to the same extent as citizens subject to certain limitations. Additionally, depending on state laws, refugees may be eligible for state public benefits. These programs are administered by a number of different federal and state agencies and are not reported to ORR. As with all populations, refugee participation rates in means-tested benefit programs are dynamic, and generally diminish over time as refugee employment rates and earnings increase. As they become employed and integrated members of the community, refugees contribute to the overall tax base of their new community, and such fiscal contributions are also not centrally measured or reported to ORR.

Each fiscal year ORR conducts a survey of a sample of refugees to track their progress over their initial five years in this country. The results of the survey are incorporated into an Annual Report to Congress. The FY 2013 survey reported utilization data on certain types of public assistance by selected refugee groups from 2008 to 2013 (covering an arrival period of five years). The types of public assistance reported were Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), general assistance (GA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) or Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and public housing.

Respondents that arrived in the United States from 3/2012 to 2/2013 (i.e., after one year of residing in the U.S.) received the following benefits in the 12 months prior to the point of the survey⁴:

- TANF: 48 percent
- RCA: 44 percent
- SSI: 22 percent

⁴ The ORR Annual Report to Congress includes survey data on benefits provided to refugees that arrive in the United States. See https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc_2013_508.pdf

- General assistance: 19 percent
- Medical Assistance or RMA: 93 percent
- SNAP: 99 percent
- Public Housing: 6 percent

(*The data provided is for respondents from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen)

It should be noted that the survey statistics only reflect current utilization by refugees arriving in each time period and do not reflect a longitudinal analysis of all refugees or of continued benefit utilization over the five year period.

Question 7: When is the last time that the Office of Refugee Resettlement conducted a financial audit of the private contractors with which it works to provide refugee resettlement services?

Response: There are state plans, grants, and contracts in place with ORR's partners that obligate them to follow uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements outlined in 2 CFR 200. Many ORR programs are administered through state programs. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) does not directly conduct financial audits of state contractors who provide refugee services. However, the single audit requirements in 2 CFR 200 subpart F sets forth standards for obtaining consistency and uniformity among federal agencies for the audit of non-federal entities expending federal awards. In accordance with OMB Circular A-133, ORR directs discretionary grantees who expend \$750,000 or more during the grantee's fiscal year in federal awards that they must have a Single Audit conducted for that year.

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar

Question 8: I think it is important to recognize that, although refugees may have arrived in the United States as the result of trauma in their homelands, these populations have added greatly to the fabric of our society and are an important part of our community. My home state of Minnesota has a proud tradition of providing a home to those fleeing war and repression, including Somalis, Liberians, and the Hmong from Southeast Asia.

- **Can you describe how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) works with voluntary organizations and the private sector to help connect refugees with career opportunities that contribute to the communities in which they are placed?**
- **Can you comment on how many of these refugees, particularly from Syria, have professional skills that are useful to American companies?**

Response: ORR's refugee and entrant assistance programs help refugees to become employed as quickly as possible. Some newly arrived refugees participate in the ORR Matching Grant (MG) Program, which provides grants for employability services that are administered by resettlement

agencies with the goal of achieving self-sufficiency within four to six months. The ORR Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG) Programs provide grants for employability services and are administered primarily by state agencies. These programs assist refugees to exit public assistance and move toward employment as soon as possible. These programs are employment focused and develop on-going relationships with local employers to support the program. In addition, many providers develop connections to the local Workforce Investment Offices (One-Stop Career Centers) to facilitate career opportunities. In some locations, services are coordinated with TANF social service providers, further broadening the scope of employment opportunities.

Newly-arriving refugees, including Syrians, have varying levels of knowledge, education, experience, and skills that are individually assessed by the ORR RSS, TAG, and MG Programs as part of employability services designed to facilitate early connections to employment. Some refugees have high levels of education and training, including professional degrees and licenses. ORR grantees assist these refugees to use their training and skills, and where feasible connect them with agencies that can help them to become U.S. certified in their occupational fields or disciplines.

Question 9: I noted that in your testimony you acknowledged the special challenges faced by refugees who are victims of torture. Along with Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) in the House, I have introduced the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act, which is also co-sponsored by Senators Franken and Durbin on this Committee. This bill authorizes increased funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to support treatment centers and services for torture victims. The Center for Victims of Torture, based in Saint Paul, has been a pioneer in providing support to victims of torture who are resettled in the United States.

- **Your testimony noted that “increasingly, recent arrivals are survivors of torture.” Can you give us some idea of the numbers of refugees who are torture survivors and where they are coming from?**
- **Can you comment on the importance of funding the Survivors of Torture Program? Would the increased funding levels recommended by the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act (\$25 million each for FY 2016 and 2017) be useful in supporting these efforts?**

Response: New research from the Center for Victims of Torture, based on a weighted average from studies published in the literature, has shown that the estimated prevalence of torture in refugees and asylees is 44 percent.⁵ The study reflects the populations who have been resettled in the U.S. from all over the world. Specifically, from Iraq, the percentage of refugees admitted as survivors of violence and/or torture has increased from 36 percent in 2014 to 49 percent in 2015. ORR anticipates that the percentage of refugees submitted for resettlement under the

⁵ <http://www.cvt.org/what-we-do/research> Center for Victims of Torture September 2015, *Torture Survivor Estimate in the United States*

survivors of violence and/or torture category will continue to increase, given the regions of the world from which many come. For example, the U.S. is resettling an increasing number of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria. Refugees from these countries have endured years of extreme violence and torture is reported to be widespread.

Torture is designed to break a person down, causing physical and mental health repercussions that can be long-lasting. Torture survivors benefit from the services of specialized torture treatment centers to reclaim their health and rebuild their lives. ORR's Survivors of Torture program funds the majority of specialized torture rehabilitation centers across the nation.

The FY 2016 budget for Survivors of Torture is \$10,735,000. This funding will maintain medical and psychological treatment, social and legal services, and other rehabilitative services for victims of torture. The need for additional funding for the Survivors of Torture program must be balanced against the need for additional funding for other programs also serving refugees, as well as the needs of other vulnerable populations ACF serves.

The Honorable David Vitter

Question 10: In your testimony to this subcommittee hearing on October 1, 2015, you testified that state governments and non-profit organizations administer the grants and various services ORR provides.

- **How often do refugees become dissatisfied with their original placement location within the United States?**
- **If these individuals choose to move locations, does this prevent them from receiving refugee benefits such as cash and medical assistance?**
- **If you cannot track refugees, does this not pose a threat to national security?**

Response: The resettlement process begins with the work of our federal agency partners in screening and vetting refugees. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States, a multi-layered and intensive screening and vetting process involving multiple law enforcement, national security, and intelligence agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of State and the Department of Defense. All refugees, including Syrians, are admitted only after successful completion of this stringent security screening regime.

- Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the State Department and DHS.
- All available biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview.
- These checks are completed by the State Department, DHS, the FBI, and the intelligence community.

- A refugee applicant cannot be approved for travel until all required security checks have been completed and cleared.

Some refugees may decide to move from their initial resettlement site, which often reflects a personal assessment by a refugee that job opportunities, family or sociocultural environment, or even climate may be preferable at some other location in the U.S. Refugees are required to file a change of address form with DHS each time they move and are informed of this requirement during their initial community orientation. When a refugee applies for legal permanent residence status, security screenings are conducted again.

Refugee relocation from the site of initial resettlement does not by itself cause refugees to lose eligibility for continued receipt of ORR RCA and RMA. Refugees still within their first eight months and who maintain compliance with eligibility requirements can continue to receive ORR RCA and ORR RMA even after they relocate. RSS and TAG services are available at locations throughout the U.S. for the refugee's first five years in the U.S. We do note that refugee enrollment in the Matching Grant (MG) program is location-specific and must occur within the first 31 days in the U.S.

The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). The design of the program is to provide a path to self-sufficiency, thus the primary purpose for data collection in ORR service delivery is to track employment related outcomes, as reported by States and other grantees. Resettlement agencies generally work with local law enforcement if any criminal or security related incident should occur. Local law enforcement is generally included in community stakeholder discussions consultations to facilitate community engagement.

The Honorable Ted Cruz

National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees⁶

Question 11: The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) has arguably done an abysmal job of handling the unaccompanied alien child (UAC) influx over the last few years. Among other things, ORR has acknowledged – in testimony, written submissions, and conversations with congressional staff – that ORR has neither a role nor an obligation to track any UAC that are released from ORR custody. This is a significant problem, particularly given the fact that ORR is responsible for releasing UAC, who are illegally present in the United States, into the general public with no means for tracking or relocation. Given that ORR is also handling assistance for the influx of Syrian refugees into the United States, what is ORR doing to track or monitor individuals who are part of the Syrian refugee influx and are receiving assistance or benefits from ORR?

⁶ The Committee understands that not all individuals that are part of the flow of people out of Syria are Syrian nationals, but we are referring to them as "Syrian refugees" here for ease of description.

Response: The refugee security screening and vetting process has been significantly enhanced over the past few years. Today, refugees undergo the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States, including the involvement of the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of State and the Department of Defense. All refugees, including Syrians, are admitted only after successful completion of this stringent security screening regime.

- o Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the State Department and DHS.
- o All available biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview.
- o These checks are completed by the State Department, DHS, the FBI, and the intelligence community.
- o A refugee applicant cannot be approved for travel until all required security checks have been completed and cleared.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement funds programs and services through states and non-profits and does not directly maintain individual case specific information on refugees accessing these services and benefits. For those refugees accessing the Match Grant Program, ORR does receive individual case records as to their progress during the first six months. The design of the program is to provide a path to self-sufficiency, thus the primary purpose for this data collection is to track employment related outcomes, as reported by States and other grantees.

II. Federal Agency Costs Associated with Syrian Refugees

Question 12: At last week's hearing, you challenged the premise that 91% of Middle Eastern refugees currently in the United States are beneficiaries of some category of financial aid or benefits (which could include federal or state benefits). Working under the assumptions that true refugees might be destitute and that reasonable, up-front financial assistance might be appropriate for a very limited period of time, please provide the following information:

- a. **How many refugees of Middle Eastern origin remain on federal benefits after one year of residing in the United States.**
- b. **How many refugees of Middle Eastern origin remain on federal benefits after two years of residing in the United States.**
- c. **How many refugees of Middle Eastern origin remain on federal benefits after five years of residing in the United States.**

Response: Each fiscal year ORR conducts a survey of a sample of refugees to track their progress over their initial five years in this country. The results of the survey are incorporated into an Annual Report to Congress. The FY 2013 survey reported utilization data on certain types of public assistance by selected refugee groups from 2008 to 2013 (covering an arrival period of five years). The types of public assistance reported were Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), general assistance (GA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) or Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and public housing. It should be noted that the survey statistics only reflect current utilization by refugees arriving in each time period and do not reflect a longitudinal analysis of all refugees or of continued benefit utilization over the five year period. Given these limitations, the following survey data—collected by year of entry to the United States for all years up to 12 months prior to the data of the survey—represents the best information we have regarding percentage of refugee utilization of public benefits.

- b. *Respondents that arrived in the United States from 3/2012 to 2/2013 (i.e., after one year of residing in the US) received the following benefits in the 12 months prior to the point of the survey⁷:
- TANF: 48 percent
 - RCA: 44 percent
 - SSI: 22 percent
 - General assistance: 19 percent
 - Medical Assistance or RMA: 93 percent
 - SNAP: 99 percent
 - Public Housing: 6 percent

(*The data provided is for respondents from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen)

- c. *Respondents that arrived in the United States from 3/2011 to 2/2012 received the following benefits in the 12 months prior to the point of the survey:
- TANF: 37 percent
 - RCA: 8 percent
 - SSI: 37 percent
 - General assistance: 12 percent
 - Medical Assistance or RMA: 72 percent
 - SNAP: 90 percent
 - Public Housing: 14 percent

(*The data provided is for respondents from Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey)

- d. *Respondents that arrived in the United States from 3/2008 to 2/2009 received the following benefits in the 12 months prior to the point of the survey:

⁷ The ORR Annual Report to Congress includes survey data on benefits provided to refugees that arrive in the United States. See https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc_2013_508.pdf

- TANF: 25 percent
- RCA: 0 percent
- SSI: 29 percent
- General assistance: 19 percent
- Medical Assistance or RMA: 68 percent
- SNAP: 83 percent
- Public Housing: 31 percent

(*The data provided is for respondents from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria)

Question 13: Is the educational background, evidence of business ownership, or long-term earning potential of a refugee something that is considered favorably in the granting of refugee status?

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). The refugee security screening and vetting process is a joint effort conducted by the State Department, DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the intelligence community. ORR is not involved in this process. ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department.

ORR defers to our partners at DHS to provide details about the information considered when making final status determinations.

Question 14: Is the lack of educational background, evidence of business ownership, or long-term earning potential of a refugee something that is considered unfavorably in the granting of refugee status?

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). The refugee security screening and vetting process is a joint effort conducted by the State Department, DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the intelligence community. ORR is not involved in this process. ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department.

ORR defers to our partners at DHS to provide details about the information considered when making final status determinations.

Question 15: What steps, if any, does ORR take to ensure that refugees are tracked or monitored upon entering the United States?

Response: The refugee security screening and vetting process has been significantly enhanced over the past few years. Today, **refugees undergo the highest level of security checks of any**

category of traveler to the United States, including the involvement of the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, DHS, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. All refugees, including Syrians, are admitted only after successful completion of this stringent security screening regime.

- Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the State Department and DHS.
- All available biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview.
- These checks are completed by the State Department, DHS, the FBI, and the intelligence community.
- A refugee applicant cannot be approved for travel until all required security checks have been completed and cleared.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement is not a law enforcement agency and does not individually track refugees. The purpose of our programs is to provide a path to self-sufficiency, thus the primary purpose of data collection is to track employment related outcomes, as reported by States and other grantees during their period of eligibility through the first five years after their arrival in the U.S. Refugees often move from their initial placement due to employment or family ties. Refugees are required to file a change of address form with DHS each time they move and are informed of this requirement during their initial community orientation. If a refugee applies for legal permanent residence status, security screenings are conducted again.

Question 16: At last week's hearing, you testified that ORR pays for the flights of the Syrian refugees that are admitted to the United States. Please provide the following information regarding ORR's payment for these flights:

- a. **The total cost for all such flights in Fiscal Year 2014 (if applicable).**
- b. **The total cost for all such flights in Fiscal Year 2015.**
- c. **Whether these flights are commercial flights, charter flights, military flights, or a combination of the above.**
- d. **Whether the refugees whose flights are paid for by ORR are required to reimburse ORR for the costs of those flights.**
- e. **If the refugees are required to reimburse ORR, the details regarding payment options for these refugees.**

- f. **If the refugees are required to reimburse ORR, the amount of costs that have been reimbursed to date (expressed in raw dollar amount and percentage).**
- g. **The number of refugees (both raw number and percentage) who have been brought to the United States at ORR's expense who cannot be located for reimbursement purposes.**

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). ORR does not pay for refugees to be brought to the United States. ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department. We defer to our partners at the State Department to provide details about the travel related costs for refugees.

Question 17: How does ORR obtain reimbursement for the flight cost (assuming ORR seeks reimbursement at all)?

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). ORR does not pay or seek reimbursement for refugees to be brought to the United States. ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department. We defer to our partners at the State Department to provide details about the travel related costs for refugees.

Question 18: If ORR is bringing Syrian refugees to the United States via commercial flights, is there any process for referring these "absconders" to federal and/or state law enforcement (including the Federal Bureau of Investigation)? If the answer is no, please explain why there is not such a law enforcement referral mechanism.

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department. We defer to our partners at the State Department to provide details about refugees travel to the United States.

Question 19: At last week's hearing, it was expressed that the United States was under a moral obligation to receive unspecified thousands of Syrian refugees, in large part because other nations (mostly, European and Middle Eastern nations) were apparently bearing the brunt of receipt of these refugees. It was suggested that the United States needs to do its

part in accepting some percentage of these refugees because of the volume of refugees and the negative impact that volume is having on the region.

Please provide the following information regarding the recent unaccompanied alien child (UAC) influx at the U.S.-Mexico border:

- a. **How many UAC were received by European Union (EU) nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).**
- b. **How much financial aid or support EU nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).**
- c. **How many UAC were received by Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).**
- d. **How much financial aid or support Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).**

Response: HHS receives funding for the Unaccompanied Children Program through Congressional appropriations; the agency does not receive funding from foreign governments to support program operations.

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA) requires ORR to care for unaccompanied children referred to its care by DHS and to place them in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child, taking into consideration any danger the child may pose to him or herself or to others in the community and any risk of flight. HHS does not place unaccompanied children into the care of European Union member countries.

Question 20: Are you aware of whether the United States has raised the issue of acceptance of Syrian refugees with either the government of the People's Republic of China or the government of the Russian Federation?

Response: We defer to our partners at the State Department to provide information, as appropriate, regarding U.S. engagement with other countries on refugee resettlement.

Question 21: Given that the Russian Federation now has a heavy combat role in Syria (and is theoretically contributing to the refugee outflow as a result of its military operations), should the Russian Federation have a greater role in the acceptance of Syrian refugees?

Response: The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), State, and Health and Human Services (HHS) work together to uphold America's humanitarian response to refugees through

the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). ORR's services are provided only after an individual successfully completes stringent security screenings, is granted refugee status by DHS, and is brought to the U.S. for resettlement by the State Department. We defer to our partners at the State Department to provide information, as appropriate, regarding U.S. engagement with other countries on refugee resettlement.

Question 22: In conversations with congressional staff, it has emerged that the Department of State is defending its low number of admissions for Syrian Christian refugees on the ground that most Syrian Christian refugees have fled directly to Lebanon, and that the United States embassy in Beirut lacks the physical, personnel, or resource capacity to process refugees in Lebanon.

With the understanding that you do not represent the Department of State, can you shed any additional light on United States government facilities and resources that are currently present in the region that can be used by the Department of State (in addition the existing diplomatic facilities) for the processing of Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon and/or elsewhere?

Response: We defer to our partners at the Department of State and DHS for information on the processing of refugees in Lebanon and the resources present to do so.

Question#:	1
Topic:	USCIS's Refugee Corps
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	Senator David Vitter
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Background: In December of 2012, you provided written testimony to a House subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, specifically addressing “efforts to deter exploitation by terrorist groups of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.” Specifically, you mentioned the USCIS’s Refugee Corps created in 2005, which provides USCIS officers with specialized training, including instruction on refugee law, grounds of inadmissibility, fraud detection and prevention, security protocols, interviewing techniques, credibility analysis, and country conditions research. You also stated the operations in Damascus, Syria, had been suspended for a period after March of 2011. In your opening statement at this subcommittee hearing on October 1, 2015, you stated, “we’ve succeeded in meeting the refugee admission ceiling of 70,000 for a third year in a row.” However, FBI Assistant Director of Counterterrorism Michael Steinbach testified, “The concern in Syria is that we don’t have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet. . . . the concern is we would be vetting databases that don’t hold information on those individuals. . . . You’re talking about a country that is a failed state. That is, does not have any infrastructure . . . so all of the datasets – the police, the intel services – that normally you would go to to seek information don’t exist.” On a separate note, you also testified the Tsarnaev brothers, responsible for the Boston Marathon Bombing, were not refugees to the United States.

What specific factors have changed since March 2011 to make you confident operations can now continue in Syria? Please provide details.

Response: DHS/USCIS is not currently operating in Syria. Syrian refugees are being interviewed in Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt, with smaller numbers interviewed elsewhere.

Question: How has the Refugee Corps training been modified to account for the threat of ISIS infiltration in the Syrian Refugee program?

Response: Refugee officers receive extensive training in asylum and refugee law, regulations, policies and procedures in addition to training on country conditions of refugee source countries, and eliciting testimony from those who have endured and fear trauma and persecution. They attend a five-week training course including an overview of international human rights law, U.S. refugee and asylum law, non-adversarial interviewing, interviewing survivors of torture, eliciting testimony, cross-cultural communication, working with an interpreter and an applicant’s representative (in asylum) or modifying an interview to accommodate applicants who are unrepresented (in both asylum and refugee cases).

Question#:	1
Topic:	USCIS's Refugee Corps
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
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After the combined five-week course, refugee officers attend an additional three-week course on refugee-specific law, regulations, procedures and policies. Throughout this training, officers are instructed that they have the duty to elicit testimony from refugees because refugees are unrepresented at their interviews and may suffer from conditions affecting their ability to articulate their claim. Several mock interviews are conducted to assess the new officers' technical knowledge as well as their non-adversarial interview skills. Officers receive additional training on country conditions and issues specific to the populations they will be interviewing.

Before they may interview refugees from the Middle East, officers must attend another five-day training specific to those caseloads. This course had been three-days long and completion was required to participate in Iraqi adjudications. Since the refugee program began to accept larger numbers of Syrian referrals as well, a Syria component was added and the course lengthened by two days. The training includes information on country conditions, armed groups operating in Iraq and Syria (including ISIS), and a classified briefing.

Question: Approximately how many hours of the 18-to-24-month admission process is a U.S. official actively working on vetting a particular individual?

Response: Security checks for vetting refugees are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. A standard suite of required inter-agency biographic and biometric security checks has been developed for all refugee applicants. The USRAP works in close coordination with federal law enforcement and intelligence community partners as part of the vetting process. The interagency effort makes it impossible for USCIS to estimate the average number of hours spent vetting each individual applicant.

Question: What guarantee can you provide that the current measures will eliminate any threat of ISIS infiltration?

Response: We cannot provide a guarantee that the current measures will eliminate all risk associated with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The inter-agency screening and USCIS interviewing processes are designed to limit that risk as much as possible, and to ensure that we know as much as possible about each refugee who seeks admission to the U.S. enabling the most informed decision possible. Adopting a strong, unequivocal position on national security allows the USRAP to minimize risk to the greatest extent possible.

Question#:	1
Topic:	USCIS's Refugee Corps
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	Senator David Vitter
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Is the FBI's Assistant Director of Counterterrorism's testimony that the United States does not have systems in places on the ground in Syria to collect enough information false? If so, why would he testify as much? If not, how can the USCIS officers' specialized training overcome this lack of information from those requesting refugee status from Syria?

Response: It is not possible to eliminate all risk associated with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). While not a traditional security check, USCIS officers conduct extensive interviews with refugee applicants to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to the United States. Officers receive additional training on country conditions and issues specific to the populations they will be interviewing. USCIS has instituted Syria-specific training for officers adjudicating cases with Syrian applicants. This training includes information on country conditions, armed groups operating in Iraq and Syria and a classified briefing.

Question: Although you have met the refugee admission ceiling of 70,000 for the last three years, what have you sacrificed to meet that ceiling?

Response: While we strive each year to realize the refugee admissions ceiling authorized by the President so that precious resettlement slots do not go unused, we are equally committed to ensuring the integrity of the program and our nation's security. We are constantly looking for ways to improve, refine, and streamline the security vetting regime for refugee applicants so that Congress and the American people can be confident that we are admitting deserving refugees to the United States. Refugee screening processes have not been compromised in order to reach the refugee admissions ceiling.

Question: What additional measures will you take to meet the 85,000 ceiling for the upcoming year?

Response: USCIS will hire and train additional staff to address the increased FY 2016 admission ceiling. New officers selected would most likely enter on duty in the late third quarter/early fourth quarter 2016 (after required medical and security clearances) and be trained in the fourth quarter. These new hires would be available for circuit rides beginning in the first quarter of FY 2017. Until new refugee officers are hired and trained, USCIS will rely on staff borrowed from other programs and trained to conduct refugee adjudications, drawing largely on asylum officers who are already protection-trained.

Question#:	1
Topic:	USCIS's Refugee Corps
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USCIS is also working to review its procedures to identify potential efficiencies, such as increased use of technology, to facilitate case processing.

Question: What sacrifices will you be forced to make in order to meet that new ceiling, and won't that negatively affect your assurances of national security?

Response: USCIS will need to hire additional refugee officers, and until they are hired and trained, USCIS will rely on staff borrowed from other programs, largely from the Asylum Corps because they are already protection-trained. Because many staff will be borrowed from the Asylum program, increasing admissions to meet the higher ceilings will have a significant impact on the Asylum program's operations, especially affirmative asylum adjudications.

Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for all applicants. The refugee vetting process in place today employs the highest security measures required for any category of traveler to the United States to protect against risks to our national security. USCIS continues to engage with law enforcement agencies and the Intelligence Community to ensure that refugee vetting for Syrian applicants is as robust as possible. While promoting humanitarian and national security mandates can be a challenge, they are not at odds with one another. Instead, by adopting a strong, unequivocal position on national security, the USRAP is able to direct precious resettlement opportunities to those truly in need of protection while maintaining the security of our nation.

Question: If not refugees, what was the status of the Tsarnaev brothers in the United States?

Response: Laws and policy relating to the confidentiality of such information preclude USCIS from speaking about the specifics of individual cases publicly. USCIS would be happy to work through the Chairman's office to arrange a classified briefing on this matter.

Question#:	2
Topic:	FDNS
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	Senator David Vitter
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Background: Your directorate's website states, "FDNS was created to strengthen the ability of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to provide the right benefit to the right person at the right time; and no benefit to the wrong person." ISIS terrorists seem to fit the bill as "wrong persons." In your opening statement at this subcommittee hearing on October 1, 2015, you testified, "USCIS has begun an additional layer of enhanced review of Syrian refugee applicants." You also mentioned that Syria does not have any computer databases we can access to run an applicant's information against. In fact, FBI Assistant Director of Counterterrorism Michael Steinbach testified, "The concern in Syria is that we don't have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet. . . . the concern is we would be vetting databases that don't hold information on those individuals. . . . You're talking about a country that is a failed state. That is, does not have any infrastructure . . . so all of the datasets – the police, the intel services – that normally you would go to seek information don't exist."

How confident are you that the policies, programs, and procedures your directorate has implemented to detect and deter fraud will be enough to ensure national security?

Response: USCIS has a high degree of confidence in the abilities of our officers, policies, programs, and procedures to identify and handle potential fraud or national security concerns. Refugee applicants are subject to the most stringent security screening of any traveler to the United States. USCIS takes our role in protecting the homeland and national security very seriously and continues to work with law enforcement and intelligence community members to identify additional opportunities to protect the integrity of the process and to guard against dangers to the United States. Additionally, USCIS Headquarters staff review Syrian refugee cases prior to DHS interview to identify potential national security concerns. For those cases with potential national security concerns, USCIS conducts open source and classified research on the facts presented and synthesizes an evaluation for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity and is used by the interviewing officer to develop lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Question: Approximately how many hours of the 18-to-24-month admission process is a U.S. official actively working on vetting a particular individual?

Question#:	2
Topic:	FDNS
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	Senator David Vitter
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Response: Security checks for vetting refugees are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. A standard suite of required inter-agency biographic and biometric security checks has been developed for all refugee applicants. The USRAP works in close coordination with federal law enforcement and intelligence community partners as part of the vetting process. The interagency effort makes it impossible for USCIS to estimate the average number of hours spent vetting each individual applicant.

Question: Do you see holes in the program, and what are you doing to plug those holes? Please provide specifics.

How would you respond to the FBI's Assistant Director of Counterterrorism's testimony that the United States does not have systems in place on the ground in Syria to collect enough information to properly screen refugees?

Response: USCIS is continuing to engage with the law enforcement and intelligence communities, including exploring training opportunities and potential screening enhancements, to ensure that refugee vetting for Syrian refugee applicants is as comprehensive and robust as possible. USCIS is aware of the challenges that Assistant Director Steinbach identified and, as an additional measure, USCIS Headquarters staff review Syrian refugee cases prior to DHS interview to identify potential national security concerns. For those cases with potential national security concerns, USCIS conducts open source and classified research on the facts presented and synthesizes an evaluation for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity and is used by the interviewing officer to develop lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Question#:	3
Topic:	Funding of FY16 Refugee Operations
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: In your testimony you discussed how your office had for some time been planning for refugee operations in Fiscal Year 2016 based on the assumption that the Administration would propose to resettle 75,000 refugees during FY16. You talked about how the last-minute change to 85,000 refugees affected your planning and about how you asked the USCIS Chief Financial Officer whether there were sufficient funds in the Examinations Fee Account to cover the processing of the additional 10,000 refugees. You testified that the USCIS CFO assured you there were indeed sufficient funds in the Examinations Fee Account

What is the additional cost to USCIS of processing the additional 10,000 refugees?

Response: USCIS estimates that its additional cost to achieve a level of 10,000 Syrian refugee admissions in FY 2016 is approximately \$18.3 Million. This is based on USCIS's estimate of \$27.4 Million in increased costs to achieve the 85,000 admissions ceiling in FY 2016 compared to the 70,000 admissions ceiling for FY 2015. Because two thirds (10,000) of the 15,000 increase are the Syrian population, USCIS multiplied the \$27.4 Million by 2/3 to arrive at approximately \$18.3 Million. USCIS does not specifically budget for or track its refugee program costs by refugee nationality.

Question: Will taking the funds from the Examinations Fee Account required to cover the additional costs described in question #1 have any impact on other USCIS programs? If so, which programs will be impacted and in what way?

Response: Funding the additional USCIS costs related to the increase in the refugee admissions ceiling will not impact any other USCIS programs.

Question: What would the funds taken from the Examinations Fee Account to cover the additional cost described in question #1 have been used for had they not been diverted to cover such cost?

Response: The increase in the refugee admissions ceiling will be funded from available unassigned fee revenue carried forward in the Immigration Examinations Fee Account from prior fiscal years. As a result, the funds will not be diverted from other programs in FY 2016. If the funds were not needed for the increase in the refugee admissions ceiling, they would remain available (if needed) to carry out all other activities authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 286 (m) and (n), i.e., to provide

Question#:	3
Topic:	Funding of FY 16 Refugee Operations
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

immigration adjudication and naturalization services, including the costs of similar services provided without charge to asylum applicants or other immigrants.

Question#:	4
Topic:	Parole Program for Syrians
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: In 2013 over 70 members of the House of Representatives sent the Secretary of Homeland Security a letter asking that the Department parole into the United States all Syrians with approved immigrant visa petitions. Under the Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program initiated earlier this year, the Administration has started to parole into the United States thousands of Haitians with approved immigrant petitions years before their immigrant visas are actually available. You confirmed in your testimony that this proposal, though initially rejected by the Administration, is once again under consideration.

Why would establishing such a parole program for Syrian nationals be necessary at all in light of the existence of the United States Refugee Admissions Program?

Response: There has been no determination that such a program is necessary.

Question: Why, specifically, did the Department initially decide not to implement the proposal?

Response: We determined that such a program would be less beneficial than refugee processing at this time. Because the U.S. Embassy in Damascus is closed, there are no means to access and process this population within Syria, the population that may have the greatest need for parole. The only alternative is to process those already outside Syria and those who may leave Syria in the future. However, those individuals may have access to refugee processing. The U.S. Government is currently processing Syrian refugees in the region, in Istanbul, Amman, and Cairo. We believe it the best use of resources and the best option for vulnerable Syrians to be processed as refugees using the existing infrastructure of the U.S. Refugee Admissions, as opposed to establishing a separate process with new infrastructure to process requests for parole for family members awaiting visa eligibility. We have informed UNHCR that we welcome refugee referrals of those with close family ties to the United States.

Question: How many Syrians is the Administration contemplating including in such a parole program?

Response: Since the determination has been made to process Syrians through the U.S. Refugee Admissions as opposed to setting up a separate parole program, we cannot provide any estimated numbers.

Question#:	4
Topic:	Parole Program for Syrians
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Please explain how such a program would not violate the congressional proscription on using parole “to circumvent Congressionally-established immigration policy or to admit aliens who do not qualify for admission under established legal immigration policies.”

Response: Since the determination has been made to process Syrians through the U.S. Refugee Admissions as opposed to setting up a separate parole program, we are not invoking the Secretary’s discretion under section 212(d)(5)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Question#:	6
Topic:	Screening of Syrian Refugees
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Under section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Naturalization Act a refugee is generally defined to be someone who is outside their country and “who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Under United States law, may someone merely seeking a better life for them and their children be classified a refugee?

Response: No, under U.S. law, a person meets the definition of a refugee only if he or she can establish past persecution or a well-founded fear of future persecution based on one of five protected grounds: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Individuals seeking better lives for themselves or for their families—but who do not meet those statutory criteria—do not meet the definition of a refugee. For the legal definition of refugee, see section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

Question: Do individuals who fear gangs, gang recruitment, or who were victims of generalized crime or violence qualify for refugee status under United States law?

Response: Having a fear of gangs or being subject to generalized crime or violence does not alone establish that a person meets the definition of a refugee. However, fear of gangs, gang recruitment, or gang-based violence can form the basis of a claim if, among other things, the nature and severity of the treatment amounts to “persecution” and the applicant is targeted on account of one of the five protected grounds. U.S. law recognizes that not only governments but also non-state actors can be persecutors, if the government is unable or unwilling to control the non-state actor engaging in or threatening the harm.

Question: At a February 11, 2015, hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security, FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach expressed significant concerns with admitting Syrian refugees to the United States, stating: “I’m concerned. We’ll have to take a look at those lists and go through all of the intelligence holdings and be very careful to try and identify connections to foreign terrorist groups.” He also said that the FBI’s databases do not have “information on those individuals, and that’s the concern.”

Question#:	6
Topic:	Screening of Syrian Refugees
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

On September 9, 2015, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper stated: "I don't, obviously, put it past the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among these refugees. So that is a huge concern of ours." Earlier this year, the Director of the FBI told the House Committee on Homeland Security that FBI databases do not necessarily have information on whether refugees are affiliated with terrorist groups.

Another problem we have is that we may not be able to criminally convict refugees of terrorist activity they committed before coming to the United States but which the U.S. Government doesn't learn about until after they have entered this country. We also cannot detain such refugees indefinitely, and home countries often do not take back their citizens who have been associated with terrorism.

Since fingerprints and name checks aren't necessarily going to uncover terrorist group affiliation, how are we going to effectively screen these people?

Response: Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. A standard suite of required biographic and biometric security checks has been developed for all refugee applicants. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. The biographic checks include vetting refugee data against the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS). CLASS is a biographic name check database used to access critical information for visa adjudication and is run on all refugee applicants. CLASS contains information from TECS (formerly the Treasury Enforcement Communication System), the Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB), Health and Human Services (HHS), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Interpol, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In addition, refugee applicants meeting certain criteria are subject to Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs), including law enforcement and intelligence communities checks. Refugee applicants are subject to a third biographic check referred to as the Interagency Check (IAC); the IAC consists of screening biographic data against a broader range of intelligence community holdings. The biometric (fingerprint) checks include screening against the holdings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Next Generation Identification (NGI), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT), and the Department of Defense Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS).

While not a traditional security check, USCIS officers also conduct extensive interviews with each refugee applicant to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee

Question#:	6
Topic:	Screening of Syrian Refugees
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

resettlement and admissibility to the United States. Prior to departing the United States, all USCIS officers conducting refugee adjudications overseas are given caseload-specific training regarding country conditions. Officers develop lines of questioning to elicit information regarding any involvement in terrorist activity, criminal activity, or the persecution/torture of others, and they use a variety of interview techniques to assess an applicant's credibility.

Additionally, USCIS Headquarters staff review Syrian refugee cases prior to DHS interview to identify potential national security concerns. For those cases with potential national security concerns, USCIS conducts open source and classified research on the facts presented and synthesizes an evaluation for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity and is used by the interviewing officer to develop lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Question: What happens when we find out, AFTER a refugee has been admitted, that the refugee is, or ever was, a terrorist? Where do we send them then?

Response: USCIS is not directly involved in apprehending or prosecuting refugees with suspected or confirmed ties to terrorism. As a component agency of the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS regularly coordinates with both ICE and CBP and provides support to law enforcement and the Intelligence Community (IC) through vetting and screening activities. When USCIS encounters derogatory information during subsequent immigration adjudications after a refugee has entered the United States, and the information is indicative of terrorist activity, USCIS informs and coordinates with the appropriate law enforcement entity and/or IC partner through established mechanisms to include coordination with respective Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) representatives.

Question#:	7
Topic:	Security screenings 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: How extensive would you say our security screenings for refugee admissions are in comparison to the security screenings provided to other groups of people entering the United States?

Response: Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States. Coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the Department of State and DHS. The process is multi-layered and intensive, involving multiple law-enforcement, national-security, and intelligence agencies across the Federal Government including the involvement of the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Terrorist Screening Center, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Defense. The refugee resettlement program has forged strong and deep relationships with colleagues in the law enforcement, national security, and intelligence communities, and the USRAP continues to benefit enormously from their expertise, analysis, and collaboration. It is a dynamic process in which USCIS and the Department of State work closely with interagency partners to improve, refine, and streamline the security vetting regime for refugee applicants. Security screening of refugees, which includes both biometric and biographic checks, occurs at multiple stages throughout the process. Screening is initiated prior to an interview with a USCIS officer, while the refugee is located overseas, and further screening is conducted immediately before a refugee's departure to the U.S., as well as upon arrival in the U.S. No refugee applicant can be approved for travel and admission to the United States until all required security checks have been completed and cleared. If there is any reason to believe that an applicant might pose a security risk to the United States, that individual will not be approved for admission.

Question: Are refugees among the most carefully vetted of all travelers to the United States?

Response: Yes, refugees are among the most carefully vetted.

Question#:	8
Topic:	Approvals 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: At the hearing, Ms. Strack stated that the “average approval rate [for refugee applications] is about 80 percent.” Ms. Strack further stated that the approval rate is “running a little over 90 percent for Syrian applicants.” I would like more context for these statistics. Accordingly, please provide the following information:

For each fiscal year since Fiscal Year 2001, please provide the approval rate for applications for the Refugee Admissions Program, including the approval rates for specific regions of the world. If available, please provide specific approval rates by nationality.

Response: USCIS does not maintain the statistics requested.

Question: For each fiscal year since Fiscal Year 2001, please provide detailed information regarding the reasons why applications were denied for the Refugee Admissions Program (e.g., applicant was found not to be a “refugee” as defined in section 101(a)(42) of the INA, applicant's package was incomplete, application was denied under section 212(a)(3) of the INA).

Response: USCIS does not maintain the statistics requested.

Question: For each fiscal year since Fiscal Year 2001, please provide the total number of waivers granted, by category, to refugee applicants under section 207(d)(3) of the INA.

Response: USCIS does not maintain the statistics requested.

Question: For each fiscal year since Fiscal Year 2001, please provide the breakdown, by nationality, and by protected ground for each nationality, of the total number of approved applications for the Refugee Admissions Program.

Response: USCIS does not maintain the statistics requested.

Question#:	9
Topic:	Section 207 of the INA
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: After being physically present in the United States for one year, refugees are required to apply to adjust their status to that of a lawful permanent resident. I would like more information about this process. For each fiscal year since Fiscal Year 2001, and in consultation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Executive Office for Immigration Review, where appropriate, please provide the following information regarding individuals who were initially admitted to the United States as refugees under section 207 of the INA:

The total number of applications to adjust status received.

Response: See chart below.

Question: The total number of applications to adjust status approved.

Response: See chart below.

Question: The total number of applications to adjust status denied, including, by ground of inadmissibility.

Response: See chart below. However, please note that statistics are not available by all specific grounds of admissibility.

Question#:	9
Topic:	Section 207 of the INA
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status Refugee Adjustments Receipts, Approvals, and Denials Fiscal Year 2001 - 2015 (Aug)				
FY	Receipts	Approvals	Denied Fraud	Denied Other
2001	90,615	78,614	21	6,350
2002	84,621	96,860	17	7,306
2003	57,809	28,634	1	2,458
2004	37,158	48,435	6	3,611
2005	41,161	80,517	3	3,920
2006	58,256	58,140	4	2,691
2007	50,910	32,159	9	1,304
2008	45,396	47,680	9	1,549
2009	65,821	85,974	34	3,537
2010	76,906	64,295	17	1,845
2011	85,031	81,477	12	1,835
2012	62,696	79,951	12	1,896
2013	57,594	49,768	19	1,665
2014	70,203	56,032	13	1,411
2015	62,630	66,700	3	1,533
Grand Total	946,807	955,236	180	42,911

Please note:

1) The report reflects the most up-to-date data available at the time the report is generated.

Database Queried: Oct 15, 2015

Report Created: Oct 15, 2015

System: Performance Reporting Tool (PRT)

By: Office of Performance and Quality (OPQ), Performance Analysis and Data Reporting (PAER), KS

Parameters

Date: Oct 1, 2000 - August 31, 2015

Question#:	9
Topic:	Section 207 of the INA
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Form Type: I-485

Data Type: Count of Refugee Adjustment Receipts, Approvals, and Denials

NOTE: Some applications approved, denied, or awaiting a decision may have been received in a previous reporting periods. Therefore approvals for some years may exceed the number of applications received.

Question: The total number of applications received that involved a waiver under section 209(c) of the INA.

Response: Because Form I-602, Application by Refugee for Waiver of Grounds of Excludability, is not required for every refugee or asylee who requires a waiver of inadmissibility at the time of adjustment of status, no History Action Code (HAC) is available in the system to track the total number of Form I-485 adjustment of status applications that involved a waiver under section 209(c) of the INA.

Question: The total number of applications approved that involved a waiver under section 209(c) of the INA.

Response: A waiver under section 209(c) does not require the completion of a Form I-602, Application by Refugee for Waiver of Grounds of Excludability, for every refugee or asylee who has been found inadmissible to the United States. For example, if a USCIS officer interviewing an applicant for adjustment of status identifies a ground of inadmissibility, the officer may elicit all relevant information and adjudicate a waiver without soliciting a Form I-602. Therefore, no History Action Code (HAC) is available in the system to track the total number of refugee and/or asylee Form I-485 adjustment of status applications received that involved a waiver under section 209(c) of the INA.

Question#:	10
Topic:	Refugee status
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: According to recent press reports, you have received 4,253 applications from individuals for the Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program. Only 90 applications have been fully adjudicated, but out of those 90, 12 percent were granted refugee status, and 84 percent were granted parole.

For each individual granted refugee status pursuant to the program, please describe the specific reasons for granting refugee status, including identifying the protected ground upon which the individual claimed to be persecuted, and the definition of the “particular social group” for each application granted on account of that protected ground.

Response: Applicants who have been conditionally approved as refugees were found to meet the definition of refugee under section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), are not inadmissible, and are not firmly resettled. Applicants must clear all required security checks prior to final approval. The USCIS Refugee Affairs Division does not systematically track which protected ground is the basis of the refugee claim. However, in this instance, given the small number of cases, it is possible to report that all cases these were approved because the applicants suffered or feared persecution on account of membership in a particular social group (PSG). USCIS does not systematically track the PSG underlying each refugee adjudication.

In assessing whether an applicant is a member of a PSG, USCIS adjudicators first examine whether the applicant and certain other members of his or her society share a common immutable trait, one that is either unchangeable or so fundamental to their identity or conscience that they should not be required to change it. Adjudicators then ask whether that trait is socially distinct by assessing whether the society in question meaningfully distinguishes individuals who possess it from those who do not. The adjudicator then determines whether the group of people has discrete boundaries and is defined with sufficient particularity to ascertain with certainty who is in the group and who is not. If all these requirements are met, the adjudicator generally will conclude that the applicant is a member of a PSG. In making these assessments the adjudicator is guided by relevant precedent regarding the criteria for establishing that a PSG exists in a society, such as, for example:

Ornelas-Chavez v. Gonzalez, 458 F.3d 1052, 1056 (9th Cir. 2006) (restating the well-settled principle that “persecution may be inflicted ... by persons or organizations which the government is unable or unwilling to control”); *Hernandez-Avalos v. Lynch*, 784 F.3d 944, 950 (4th Cir. 2015) (examining family as a particular social group and concluding

Question#:	10
Topic:	Refugee status
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
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that applicant's relationship to her son is why she, and not another person, was threatened with death if she did not allow him to join Mara 18); *Cordova v. Holder*, 759 F.3d 332, 339 (4th Cir. 2014) (finding nexus to particular social group established where applicant was targeted on account of his kinship ties to his cousin and uncle); *Matter of A-R-C-G-*, 26 I&N Dec. 388, 390 (BIA 2014) (finding that status within a domestic relationship which the applicant is unable to leave may define a particular social group); *Ming Li Hui v. Holder*, 769 F.3d 984 (8th Cir. 2014) (acknowledging "Chinese daughters [who are] viewed as property by virtue of their position within a domestic relationship" as a particular social group but denying asylum on other grounds); and the following cases related to particular social group and opposition to gang activity: *Matter of M-E-V-G-*, 26 I&N Dec. 227 (BIA 2014); *Matter of W-G-R-*, 26 I&N Dec. 208 (BIA 2014); *Crespin-Valladares v. Holder*, 632 F.3d 117 (4th Cir. 2011).

Of course, establishing membership in a particular social group is not the end of the inquiry. The adjudicator then must determine whether the applicant has met all the other requirements of refugee law, including showing that he was or has a well-founded fear of being targeted on account of membership in that group, that the harm involved is serious enough to be persecution, and that the state is unable and unwilling to protect from that harm.

Question: How many individuals have been granted parole pursuant to the program? For each individual granted parole, please explain specifically why parole was granted, and the specific reason under section 212(d)(5)(A) of the INA for which the alien was granted parole.

Response: Section 212(d)(5)(A) of the INA authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security to "in his discretion parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit any alien applying for admission to the United States" The Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program (CAM) program was established as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to address the underlying economic and security challenges facing Central American countries and the increase in unlawful migration of unaccompanied minors across the U.S. border.

In 2014, the U.S. experienced an unprecedented increase in the migration of unaccompanied children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras using criminal

Question#:	10
Topic:	Refugee status
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

networks, as outlined in the February 2015 GAO report.¹ In response, DHS and the Department of State have adopted a multi-faceted strategy to deter large numbers of children from using criminal cartels and smugglers to take the dangerous journey to the United States and to avoid the humanitarian challenges of any large scale irregular migration, particularly of families and unaccompanied children. The CAM program is one facet of that strategy, and the consideration of these policy goals as part of a case-by-case determination whether to exercise the parole authority as a matter of discretion is fully consistent with section 212(d)(5)(A).

To date, parole has been considered on a case-by-case basis for children who qualified for access to the CAM program (i.e., those with a parent lawfully present in the United States and whose claimed genetic, step, or legally adopted relationship had been confirmed by DHS) but who did not establish eligibility for refugee status. Parole generally has been conditionally approved in cases in which the USCIS officer has determined that such children demonstrated a well-founded fear of harm (usually from gang-related or other violence) and no serious adverse factors were present warranting a negative exercise of discretion. As of December 28, 2015, 410 cases which comprise 420 individuals have been conditionally approved for parole under the CAM program. Prior to final parole approval, applicants must clear all required security checks, pay for a medical exam, and pay for travel to United States on an International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranged flight.

¹ Available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668749.pdf>.

Question#:	11
Topic:	Temporary Protected Status
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: How many aliens in the United States currently have Temporary Protected Status? Please break down the response by country of nationality.

Response: USCIS provides an annual report to Congress detailing the number of individuals in the United States who are covered by Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The data provided in the table below reflects the information submitted in the 2014 report titled, *Temporary Protected Status: Calendar Year 2014 Annual Report*. USCIS will be compiling the annual TPS report for 2015 in January and will provide a copy of that report upon its completion.

The following table shows the number of TPS beneficiaries at the end of Calendar Year 2014, broken down by country of citizenship. Please note that Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone were initially designated for TPS on November 21, 2014. Consequently, USCIS had not issued any final approvals under these designations as of the end of Calendar Year 2014, reflected in the totals of zero for these countries in the table below. Beneficiaries under these three designations will be included in the 2015 report, along with beneficiaries under the initial designations of Nepal and Yemen, which occurred in Calendar Year 2015.

Country	Total
El Salvador	253,824
Guinea	0
Haiti	58,605
Honduras	83,041
Liberia	0
Nicaragua	4,293
Sierra Leone	0
Somalia	484
South Sudan	18
Sudan	501
Syria	4,610
Total	405,376

Question#:	12
Topic:	Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Please provide detailed information on the immigration histories of Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, including, but not limited to, status at time of entry or admission to the United States, subsequent statuses, or immigration benefits received, and naturalization information, if applicable.

Response: Laws and policy related to the confidentiality of such information preclude USCIS from speaking about the specifics of individual cases publicly. USCIS would be happy to work through the Chairman's office to arrange a classified briefing on this matter.

Question#:	13
Topic:	P-3 program 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Could the P-3 program be expanded without undermining security?

Response: Access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) falls under the purview of the Department of State (State) and, therefore, State is best positioned to address this point. DHS consults with State with regard to USRAP access decisions, with particular attention to the potential for fraud and national security risks. Given the prior suspension of the P-3 program due to documented fraud, any expansion of the P-3 program must carefully address the benefits of family reunification while incorporating appropriate safeguards.

Question#:	14
Topic:	P-3 program 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Ms. Strack, at the hearing I asked you whether the P-3 program could be expanded to all applicants for resettlement who have relatives in the United States. Specifically, I am concerned that applicants might be rejected, even when they can demonstrate with 100 percent certainty that they have a family member living legally in the United States, simply because their U.S. family member was not first granted legal status as an asylee or refugee. You pointed out that the P-3 program had been suspended because of fraud in the system and asserted that because of this history any proposed expansion should proceed cautiously. I agree that we must guard against fraud in any important government program. However, I am not clear how the P-3 program's history speaks to my proposal for expansion of the eligibility criteria for access to the program.

The P-3 program was suspended because applicants claimed to have a family member in the United States when in fact they were not related to the U.S. resident identified in their applications.

What actions has USCIS taken to reduce the opportunity for this kind of fraud? Do you believe these efforts to reduce fraud have been effective?

Response: The P-3 program has undergone significant changes in recent years. In order to qualify for access under the P-3 program, an applicant must be outside of his or her country of origin, be registered or have legal status in the country of asylum, have had an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) filed on his or her behalf by an eligible family member in the United States during a period in which the nationality was included on the eligibility list, and have been cleared for onward processing by the DHS/USCIS Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU).

Since the P-3 program resumed in October 15, 2012, after a suspension period due to fraud concerns, the AOR has been an official Department of State form (DS-7656). The form contains new language about penalties for committing fraud, and alerts filers that DNA evidence of certain claimed biological parent-child relationships will be required in order to gain access to a USCIS interview for refugee admission to the United States through the P-3 program.

Question: Is the immigration status of the U.S. relative relevant to an assessment of the resettlement applicant's relationship to a U.S. relative? In other words, if the U.S. relative first gained legal status as a refugee or asylee, is it somehow more difficult for a resettlement applicant to fraudulently claim a U.S. relative?

Question#:	14
Topic:	P-3 program 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Response: Qualifying individuals are persons who were admitted to the United States as refugees or were granted asylum, including persons who are lawful permanent residents or U.S. citizens who initially were admitted to the United States as refugees or were granted asylum. The U.S.-based filer must be at least 18 years of age at the time the Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) is filed and must file the AOR within 5 years of the date the individual entered the U.S. as a refugee or was granted asylum. The USRAP may reject any AOR for a relationship that does not comport with public policy, such as under-age or plural marriages.

Individuals who arrive as refugees provide significant family tree information during their initial adjudication which can be reviewed and verified during P-3 processing. Asylum applicants provide information about spouses, children, parents and siblings, during their initial adjudication which can be reviewed during P-3 processing as well.

Question#:	15
Topic:	Videoconferencing 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Can videoconferencing be used to make the refugee screening process more efficient?

Response: Currently USCIS regulations require that refugee eligibility interviews be conducted "in person." 8 C.F.R. § 207.2(a). Videoconferencing therefore is not currently allowable. USCIS, however, is looking into the potential future use of videoconferencing for refugee interviews.

Question#:	16
Topic:	Videoconferencing 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: As you know, USCIS has studied the use of videoconferencing instead of in-person interviews in the context of credible fear interviews. The agency found no discernible statistical difference between conducting interviews in person and using videoconferencing. In fact, USCIS conducts 55 percent of its credible fear interviews through video, and an additional three percent by telephone. And that is in the context of interviews conducted in the United States, where it would be relatively easy for asylum officers to conduct interviews in person.

Yet, I understand that USCIS continues to conduct all interviews of Syrian resettlement applicants in person. When security concerns prevent DHS officials from traveling to Syria to conduct interviews, the result can be long delays at exactly the time when Syrian refugees are likely to be in the most danger.

Do you have any evidence that the use of videoconferencing to interview Syrian refugees would undermine security?

Response: Because USCIS regulations do not permit refugee eligibility interviews to be conducted by videoconferencing, USCIS has no evidence with regard to videoconferencing and Syrian refugee applicants.

Question: Would you consider using videoconferencing to increase the efficiency of the refugee screening process?

Response: Currently USCIS regulations require that refugee eligibility interviews be conducted "in person", 8 CFR 207.2(a), therefore videoconferencing is not currently allowable. USCIS is considering the viability of videoconferencing in this context.

However, USCIS notes that videoconferencing processing may also present significant operational challenges in terms of remote staffing, interpretation, and operational infrastructure in the field to support the refugee's participation in a videoconferencing interview such as the availability of necessary equipment, physical security requirements, and secure communication channels.

Question: It seems to me that videoconferencing could be a key mechanism for bringing greater efficiency to this process, and I'd like to help you. Would you keep me updated as you look into it?

Question#:	16
Topic:	Videoconferencing 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Response: Yes.

Question#:	17
Topic:	Security screenings 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Could screenings be better timed to avoid needless duplication and delay?

Response: Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. Part of the inter-agency review process is always focused on identifying efficiencies where possible, without jeopardizing national security given the impacts the screening may have on the overall logistical flow of processing. In the summer of 2015, the inter-agency enhanced certain screening activities so that they continue recurrently and seamlessly in the background, throughout the refugee processing timeline until entry into the United States. This served not only to assist with the efficiency of the program, but also enhanced the integrity of the program by ensuring the potential for new information collected by inter-agency partners is communicated at any time.

Question#:	18
Topic:	Security screenings 3
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: As several of the witnesses discuss in their testimony, applicants for resettlement in the United States go through a number of different screenings. As I understand it, these screenings generally have a limited validity period. If a certain amount of time has passed since the screening and an applicant has not resettled in the United States, the screening expires and the applicant has to start over. It is possible that a refugee could be delayed through no fault of her own if one screening expires before another can be completed, and the refugee has to endure the hassle, the expense, and the delay associated with completing the same screening twice. In some cases, an entire family could have their screenings expire while they wait for one family member to get final approval.

This question is for whoever can speak to the issue. It may be a few of you. Is the Administration considering ways to better time the resettlement application process to ensure that applicants do not have to needlessly go through the same screenings multiple times?

Response: Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. Part of the inter-agency review process is always focused on identifying efficiencies where possible, without jeopardizing national security given the impacts the screening may have on the overall logistical flow of processing. In the summer of 2015, the inter-agency enhanced certain screening activities so that they continue recurrently and seamlessly in the background, throughout the refugee processing timeline until entry into the United States. This served not only to assist with the efficiency of the program, but also enhanced the integrity of the program by ensuring the potential for new information collected by our inter-agency partners is communicated at any time.

Question: This seems like an area where the resettlement process could be made more efficient without any cost in terms of security. I would like to work with you on this. Would you keep me updated?

Response: Yes.

Question#:	19
Topic:	Approvals 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: What happens when an entire family is delayed because a single family member has not been approved?

Response: This is a complex issue, since some derogatory security check results may implicate other family members, and thus a case is not considered approvable until all security checks of all case members are clear. However, under certain circumstances where multiple cases involving extended family members are cross-referenced, it may be possible for certain cases to be approved for travel while other family members await clearances. State's Resettlement Support Center staff work with applicants in these situations to discuss their options.

As a matter of practice USCIS does not promote the separation of family members except in limited circumstances. This is compounded in the event the delay is related to a security check, which would then force USCIS to then consider the separation of family members for possible admission to the United States when they have known affiliations or connections to an individual that poses a risk to national security.

Question#:	20
Topic:	Approvals 3
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: As you know, families frequently apply to resettle together. For a family to be accepted, each member must be screened and approved. I have heard concerns that, as a result, entire families will often be stalled because a single family member's application has gotten delayed.

How often does that kind of thing happen-where a family is held up because of a single family member or maybe two family members?

Response: USCIS does not collect these data, but the Department of State may be able to generate a responsive report from its WRAPS database, which is the case management system used by the USRAP.

Question: Do you have a process for expediting consideration of particular applicants when clearing one applicant would allow an entire family to move forward? Can you describe that process? How often do you use it?

Response: Yes, mechanisms exist to expedite security checks, and they are used for parts of the process coordinated by both DHS and State on a regular basis. Typically either DHS or State will send a list of the cases to be expedited to a vetting partner on a periodic basis. However, potential delays due to certain security check results cannot be anticipated, rendering it impossible to ensure that expedited processing can be achieved in all cases where it has been requested.

Question#:	21
Topic:	Approvals 4
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: It seems to me that, if an entire family is delayed because of a single family member, the family might want to know what is going on. Then the family could choose whether to continue their application as a group or to let the approved members of the family move forward and leave the delayed member to follow them later.

Do you inform families when the whole family has been stalled because the application of a particular family member has been delayed?

Response: This is a complex issue, since some derogatory security check results may implicate other family members, and thus a case is not considered approvable until all security checks of all case members are clear. However, under certain exceptional circumstances, it may be possible for certain family members to be approved for travel while others await clearances. By statute and regulation, however, a derivative is not permitted to enter the United States prior to a principal applicant. As outlined in 8 C.F.R. § 207.7(a), a spouse or child:

shall be granted refugee status if accompanying or following-to-join the principal alien. An accompanying derivative is a spouse or child of a refugee who is in the physical company of the principal refugee when he or she is admitted to the United States, or a spouse or child of a refugee who is admitted within 4 months following the principal refugee's admission. A following-to-join derivative, on the other hand, is a spouse or child of a refugee who seeks admission more than 4 months after the principal refugee's admission to the United States.

DHS and the State's Resettlement Support Center staff closely coordinate these types of cases. RSC staff, rather than DHS, work with applicants in these situations to discuss their options, as some families prefer not to be separated.

Question: If not, would you be willing to consider doing so?

Response: Given that this is a complex issue, the question of whether a family member should be informed when the applications of other relatives are delayed would need to be discussed in the context of an overall review of the security check and USRAP process, consistent with applicable laws, policies and procedures.

Question#:	22
Topic:	IACs I
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: How many IACs are stuck in limbo, and how can that be resolved?

Response: In the summer of 2015, the inter-agency enhanced certain screening activities so that they continue recurrently and seamlessly in the background, throughout the refugee processing timeline until entry into the United States. This enhancement not only helped improve program efficiency, but, also enhanced the integrity of the program by ensuring the potential for new information collected by our inter-agency partners is communicated at any time. As a result of these process changes, USCIS has 27,136 individual IAC's pending responses from the vetting agencies as of January 14, 2016, of which approximately 78 percent were requested on or after December 1, 2015.

Question#:	23
Topic:	IACs 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: As you know, applicants for resettlement go through a screening known as the Interagency Check, or IAC. This process is in addition to a number of other biographic and biometric checks that applicants have to undergo.

My understanding is that sometimes IACs are, at least initially, inconclusive. Applicants get back a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision”-meaning they have been neither approved nor denied. I have heard concerns that applicants who have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” are left in limbo and not given a chance to clear up whatever ambiguity led to them receiving an inconclusive check.

As of today, how many applicants for resettlement have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” but not yet had their cases resolved?

Response: “Not cleared” and “no decision” are two distinct categories with regard to refugee security checks. There are currently no individuals with a status of “no decision” related to an IAC. USCIS is currently working through a queue of approximately 1,740 individuals who have received a “not cleared” result from one of the interagency security vetting partners, which requires resolution and issuance of a final decision by USCIS.

Question: Do you give applicants the opportunity to provide information you need to move their cases from inconclusive to resolved?

Response: Whether applicants are scheduled for a re-interview to resolve security check information is determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the derogatory information. While it is not uncommon for certain aspects of the refugee screening process to uncover information that can ultimately be addressed during a re-interview, the information obtained during the IAC process typically represents some of the US Government’s most sensitive information, and it is often classified. In addition, significant effort is put into these processes by the inter-agency to ensure that information reported meets stringent thresholds and has a high degree of reliability.

If information is obtained through the IAC process that could be released to the applicant in order to allow the applicant to provide information to overcome what was provided to USCIS, we would work with our inter-agency partners to ensure that occurred appropriately without jeopardizing national security. In instances where classified information is reported back to USCIS, USCIS conducts an eligibility review to ensure the information reported during the IAC process relates to the applicant and whether there

Question#:	23
Topic:	IACs 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

is any information gleaned during the refugee processing that may provide additional context to the inter-agency check, causing them to reconsider the information contained within their holdings.

Question: Would you look into whether more can be done to let resettlement applicants help clarify any ambiguities in their checks-provided they can do so without accessing classified materials?

Response: USCIS will continue to work with our inter-agency partners to ensure that our screening processes are the most effective and efficient possible, and that we provide all appropriate opportunities for applicants to provide additional information.

Question#:	24
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: At last week's hearing, testimony confirmed what was already assumed by most people who are presently focused on the Syrian refugee issue, which is that the United States government has zero ability to access civilian records of any kind within the sovereign territory of Syria. This confirmation dovetails with admissions during other Administration briefings on this subject, in which representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies have confirmed that Syria is an intelligence "black hole," and that there is virtually no way to obtain reliable data from anywhere in Syria. The combined feedback from this Administration is troubling, and raises concerns that the United States government could be admitting people into the United States who are posing as refugees but represent significant national security risks.

Can you confirm the following:

That United States government officials have no access to civilian local or municipal records within the sovereign territory of Syria?

Response: USCIS will work with your staff to schedule a classified briefing on this issue.

Question: That United States government officials have no access to civilian national records within the sovereign territory of Syria?

Response: USCIS will work with your staff to schedule a classified briefing on this issue.

Question#:	25
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Has the Assad government provided any assistance to help identify Syrian nationals who are asserting refugee status, either by supplying records or offering to verify claims made by alleged Syrian refugees? If the answer is yes, please provide additional details.

Response: The United States does not have any agreements in place with the Syrian Government for information sharing to assist with refugee processing. Also, for confidentiality reasons, USCIS does not share information about refugee applicants with the applicants' home country's government. Sharing such information could subject the individual to retaliatory measures by government authorities or non-state actors if the individual is repatriated, or endanger the security of the individual's family members or associates who may still be residing in the country of origin. Such disclosure could also give rise to a plausible protection claim when one would not otherwise exist by bringing an otherwise ineligible individual to the attention of the government authority or non-state actor against which the individual has made allegations to support the claim for protection.

Question#:	26
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 3
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Given the likelihood that the Assad government favors the refugee flow (since any legitimate Syrian nationals leaving Syria at this time are likely either opponents of the Assad government or ISIS operatives taking advantage of the refugee flow), would you acknowledge that the Assad government may have an incentive to allow an uncontrolled, unconditional exodus of Syrian nationals from Syria at this time?

Response: USCIS's role with regard to refugee processing is to adjudicate applications on a case-by-case basis. It is not within our jurisdiction to assess the Syrian Government's motivations with regard to the refugee flow from Syria.

Question#:	27
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 4
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Have any other Middle Eastern or European governments provided any assistance to help identify Syrian nationals who are asserting refugee status, either by supplying records or offering to verify claims made by alleged Syrian refugees? If the answer is yes, please provide additional details.

Response: USCIS is able to leverage existing information sharing where we have established agreements in place. For refugee applications, this bilateral/multilateral sharing does not occur on a systematic basis, but rather on an ad hoc basis.

Question#:	28
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 5
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Is it fair to state that, if an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee, and asserts to be a Syrian national, but offers no objective or verifiable records or other information that assures identity or nationality, and provides no indication during his or her interview that their story is fabricated, the United States government will accept that refugee's claim that he or she is a Syrian national, without further verification? If the answer is yes, please explain the justification for this position.

Response: No. The U.S. Government does not automatically accept a refugee's claim of a specific nationality without further verification. While having verifiable documentation always assists our adjudicative process, the authenticity of documents is a concern that is present in all aspects of immigration adjudications and as such, USCIS Officers do not simply rely on documents to confirm relationships and statements. Officers are thoroughly trained in interview techniques to probe family relationships and the backgrounds of applicants to identify other aspects of the immigration claim that may call into question the legitimacy of the information presented to include whether an applicant was actually from the country of interest. USCIS officers conduct extensive interviews with each refugee applicant to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to the United States.

Prior to departing the United States, all USCIS officers conducting refugee adjudications overseas are given caseload-specific training regarding country conditions which includes familiarization with the specific country of origin an individual would be claiming to be from. Officers develop lines of questioning to elicit information regarding any involvement in terrorist activity, criminal activity, or the persecution/torture of others, and they use a variety of interview techniques to assess an applicant's credibility.

Question#:	29
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 6
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Is it fair to state that, if an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee, but offers no objective or verifiable records or other information that assures identity or nationality, and provides no indication during his or her interview that their story is fabricated, and the individual's offered identity does trigger a derogatory hit on any of the security databases that are used to determine terrorist or criminal activity, the United States government will consider that individual to not be a security risk? If the answer is yes, please explain the justification for this position.

Response: No. The U.S. Government does not automatically accept a refugee's claim of a specific nationality without further verification. The U.S. Government also conducts extensive security checks and reviews before any final decision is made on whether an individual poses a security risk. Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. If an applicant were to trigger a positive match through one of these security checks, the individual would be considered a security risk, and a complete review of all information would be conducted before final adjudicative outcomes would occur. USCIS also denies cases based on the applicant's testimony, including cases in which there are no derogatory security check results.

Question#:	30
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 7
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: If an individual presents himself or herself to United States officials as a refugee as part of this flow out of Syria, but is identified as (or admits to being) a citizen of a nation other than Syria, is their application for refugee status automatically denied? If the answer is no, please provide a detailed explanation as to why such applications are not automatically denied.

Response: No, an application for refugee status would not be automatically denied based solely on the individual's claimed nationality; however, this would be a significant discrepancy that would need to be addressed at interview and overcome by the applicant in order to qualify for resettlement. In order to be eligible for access to the USRAP, applicants must be "of special humanitarian concern" to the United States. INA sec. 207(a)(3). As part of the eligibility review, USCIS first determines that the applicant has access to the U.S. resettlement program, in most cases for Syrian refugees, through a proper referral from UNHCR. If it were determined that the applicant has misrepresented any material facts during the process, it would then become a concern under the fraud and willful misrepresentation grounds of inadmissibility under INA section 212(a)(6)(C), and the case would be placed on hold for review and possible denial.

Question#:	31
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 8
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Please explain what provision of federal law (if any) would prevent United States officials who are involved in reviewing refugee applications from only approving applications of individuals who can demonstrate Syrian citizenship and identity.

Response: Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act governs the refugee adjudication. To be found eligible for resettlement, a refugee applicant must: 1) be of special humanitarian concern to the U.S.; 2) meet the definition of refugee; 3) not be firmly resettled; and 4) be admissible to the United States. Refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States are identified in the annual Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions following interagency consultations as required under section 207. For FY 2016, refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States include certain Syrian nationals, as well as certain nationals of dozens of other countries who meet USRAP access criteria. There is no provision of federal law that would prohibit United States officials from limiting approval of refugee applications to Syrian nationals who can demonstrate Syrian citizenship and identity.

Question#:	32
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 9
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Please explain how it is not a massive national security risk to admit individuals to the United States who purport to be Syrian national refugees but can offer no objective or verifiable records or other information to establish their identity or nationality.

Response: It is not possible to eliminate all risk associated with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The inter-agency screening and USCIS interviewing processes are designed to limit that risk as much as possible, and to ensure that we know as much as possible about each refugee that seeks admission to the U.S. enabling the most informed decision possible. While promoting humanitarian and national security mandates can be a challenge, they are not at odds with one another. Instead, by adopting a strong, unequivocal position on national security, the USRAP is able to ensure that precious resettlement opportunities remain available to those truly in need of protection while maintaining the security of our nation

Question#:	33
Topic:	National Security Issues Relating to Syrian Refugees 10
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: At last week's hearing, your testimony and the testimony of other witnesses made it clear that the United States government's ability to screen the Syrian refugee flow for potential terrorism or national security threats depends almost entirely on their being flagged in an existing domestic or international terrorism or criminal database. While this allays some concerns, it does not address the fundamental reality of the security threat currently posed by ISIS in Syria, given that ISIS is drawing an abundance of recruits who may be local and not previously involved in domestic or international terrorism.

Does the United States government have any way to learn of an individual's possible affiliation with ISIS (or any other terrorist organization) in the absence of either some derogatory database hit or some indication in the course of interviews that the person is not credible?

Response: Security checks are an integral part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for applicants of all nationalities. A standard suite of required biographic and biometric security checks has been developed for all refugee applicants. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats.

While not a traditional security check, USCIS officers conduct extensive interviews with each refugee applicant to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to the United States. Prior to departing the United States, all USCIS officers conducting refugee adjudications overseas are given caseload-specific training regarding country conditions. Officers develop lines of questioning to elicit information regarding any involvement in terrorist activity, criminal activity, or the persecution/torture of others, and they use a variety of interview techniques to assess an applicant's credibility.

Additionally, USCIS Headquarters staff are reviewing Syrian refugee cases prior to DHS interview to identify potential national security concerns. For those cases with potential national security concerns, USCIS conducts open source and classified research on the facts presented and synthesizes an evaluation for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity and is used by the interviewing officer to develop lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Question#:	34
Topic:	Federal Agency Costs Associated with Syrian Refugees 1
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: At last week's hearing, it was expressed that the United States was under a moral obligation to receive unspecified thousands of Syrian refugees, in large part because other nations (mostly, European and Middle Eastern nations) were apparently bearing the brunt of receipt of these refugees. It was suggested that the United States needs to do its part in accepting some percentage of these refugees because of the volume of refugees and the negative impact that volume is having on the region.

Please provide the following information regarding the recent unaccompanied alien child (UAC) influx at the U.S.-Mexico border:

How many UAC were received by European Union (EU) nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question: How much financial aid or support EU nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question: How many UAC were received by Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations during the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question: How much financial aid or support Middle Eastern or Central Asian nations sent to the United States to support the UAC influx over the last few years (broken down by nation and fiscal year).

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question#:	35
Topic:	Federal Agency Costs Associated with Syrian Refugees 2
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Are you aware of whether the United States has raised the issue of acceptance of Syrian refugees with either the government of the People's Republic of China or the government of the Russian Federation?

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question#:	36
Topic:	Federal Agency Costs Associated with Syrian Refugees 3
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: Given that the Russian Federation now has a heavy combat role in Syria (and is theoretically contributing to the refugee outflow as a result of its military operations), should the Russian Federation have a greater role in the acceptance of Syrian refugees?

Response: USCIS is unable to address this question, as it is outside the purview and jurisdiction of USCIS.

Question#:	37
Topic:	Federal Agency Costs Associated with Syrian Refugees 4
Hearing:	Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
Primary:	The Honorable Ted Cruz
Committee:	JUDICIARY (SENATE)

Question: In conversations with congressional staff, it has emerged that the Department of State is defending its low number of admissions for Syrian Christian refugees on the ground that most Syrian Christian refugees have fled directly to Lebanon, and that the United States embassy in Beirut lacks the physical, personnel, or resource capacity to process refugees in Lebanon.

With the understanding that you do not represent the Department of State, can you shed any additional light on United States government facilities and resources that are currently present in the region that can be used by the Department of State (in addition the existing diplomatic facilities) for the processing of Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon and/or elsewhere?

Response: USCIS cannot comment on the State Department's resources, but can describe our own operations in Lebanon. Only USCIS staff, not State Department staff, are authorized to conduct refugee eligibility determinations.

Worldwide, the State Department's Regional Security Officers (RSOs), who are part of the Diplomatic Security branch at State, make the decision on where it is safe for U.S. government employees to live and work. In Lebanon, their judgment for a number of years has been that USCIS employees who travel to Beirut to conduct refugee interviews must live and work in the U.S. Embassy, due to the security situation. From time to time in Lebanon, the RSO's office has permitted very limited excursions outside the embassy and allowed USCIS staff to work for a single day at the site of the State Department's contractor. The last time that the U.S. embassy in Beirut issued country clearance to a full team of USCIS officers was September 2014. The embassy in Beirut was able to support one USCIS officer to stay one night overnight in FY 2015 to interview a handful of emergency refugee cases. USCIS currently plans to return to Beirut to conduct refugee interviews in the second quarter of FY 2016.

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

*Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary*



September 29, 2015

TO: Dick Durbin, US Senator
711 Hart Senate Building
Washington DC 20510

RE: Immigration Subcommittee Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis
Statement from the American Baptist Churches USA

On behalf of the American Baptist Churches USA, I would like to encourage the U.S. government to increase the number of Syrian refugees admitted to the United States without regard to refugee faith status.

The American Baptist Churches USA has a longstanding policy stating: "We recognize that the global dimension of the refugee situation places a responsibility on all nations, and we call upon all nations to share this obligation."

We have been actively supplying relief funds for refugees who have fled both to Jordan and to Lebanon through our Baptist partners in those regions. These funds have supported refugees of all faiths.

In light of such overwhelming human need we are called as a nation to respond with generous support for refugees and to welcome those whose lives have been irrevocably disrupted through war. As a member of Church World Service, the American Baptist Churches has consistently responded to the need for refugee resettlement and shall continue to do so.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. Roy Medley'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary



STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

**SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST**

**HEARING ON “OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION’S FY 2016 REFUGEE
RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM: FISCAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS”**

October 1, 2015

Contact:

Beth Werlin, Director of Policy
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1331 G Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
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The American Immigration Council is a non-profit organization which for over 25 years has been dedicated to increasing public understanding of immigration law and policy and the role of immigration in American society. We write to share our analysis and research regarding refugees coming to the United States and the many safeguards already in place.

As set forth in our publication, “[Refugees: A Fact Sheet](#)” (October 1, 2014) (Attachment A), the United States plays an important role in protecting thousands of the world’s most vulnerable people. The United States is one of 28 countries that resettles refugees. A refugee is a person who either has been persecuted or has a “well-founded fear” of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.¹ This definition derives from the United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols relating to the Status of Refugees, which the United States became a party to in 1968.²

The United States Has a Rigorous Screening Process In Place

The United States has established a rigorous screening process for refugees coming to our country. Before admission as a refugee, a person must pass through an extensive 13 step screening process.³ This process includes having fingerprints and a photograph taken by the U.S. government, an in person interview with the Department of Homeland Security, two different interagency security background checks, a medical screening, and a final security check by

¹ 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(42)(A) (2015).

² Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, available at, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

³ U.S. Committee For Refugees and Immigrants, “Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process,” available at: <http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/Refugee%20resettlement%20-%20step%20by%20step%20USCRI.pdf>.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP).⁴ We currently have systems in place to ensure the safety and security of our nation, while also fulfilling our humanitarian obligations around the world.

Responding to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The violence and devastation in Syria has led to the largest number of refugees since World War II. The United States must respond to this crisis by carrying on our long history of welcoming those fleeing such dire situations. Recently, President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry began to signal that the United States will respond more robustly. He directed his Administration to accept at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next fiscal year and to increase the number of overall refugees to 100,000 from the current level of 70,000.⁵ We must do more.

The Immigration Council has joined a broad coalition of organizations to urge the President to increase the number of refugees that we resettle to 200,000 for FY 16, with 100,000 of them being Syrian. [As we explain](#),

After the end of the wars in Southeast Asia, the United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then essentially doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980. The United States' rising to the occasion now would both encourage European nations to live up to their refugee protection obligations, and help to prevent further deterioration in the protection climate in the countries bordering on Syria that are currently hosting millions of Syrian refugee.

We should heed the call from Pope Francis last week to “not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation.”⁶

⁴ Id.

⁵ Michael Gordon; Alison Smale; Rick Lyman, “U.S. Will Accept More Refugees As Crisis Grows,” New York Times, September 20, 2015, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/europe/us-to-increase-admission-of-refugees-to-100000-in-2017-kerry-says.html>.

⁶ Politico Staff, Full Text: Pope Francis' historic address to Congress, Politico, September 24, 2015 available at, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/09/pope-francis-speech-to-congress-transcript-text-video-214016#ixzz3mfb2vqsD>.

ATTACHMENT A



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December 2014

REFUGEES: A FACTSHEET

The need for international protection of refugees stemmed from the plight of displaced civilians in Europe during World War II. Most refugees are displaced from their country of origin to a neighboring country, and then resettled to a third country through international organizations like the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The United States resettles [more refugees](#) than any other country, and these refugees go on to contribute to our communities and our economy.¹

What is a refugee?

A refugee, as defined by Section 101(a)42 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. This definition is based on the [United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols](#) relating to the Status of Refugees, which the United States became a party to in [1968](#).² Following the Vietnam War and the U.S. experience of resettling Indochinese refugees, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which [incorporated](#) the Convention’s definition into U.S. law and provides the legal basis for today’s U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).³

How many refugees are there in the world?

- The [2012 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook](#) reports that there are 10.5 million refugees worldwide. In 2012, children under the age of 18 represented [46 percent](#) of the refugee population.⁴
- The [top origin countries](#) for refugees are Afghanistan (2.6 million), Somalia (1.1 million), Iraq (746,200), Syria (729,000), Sudan (569,000), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (509,300).⁵

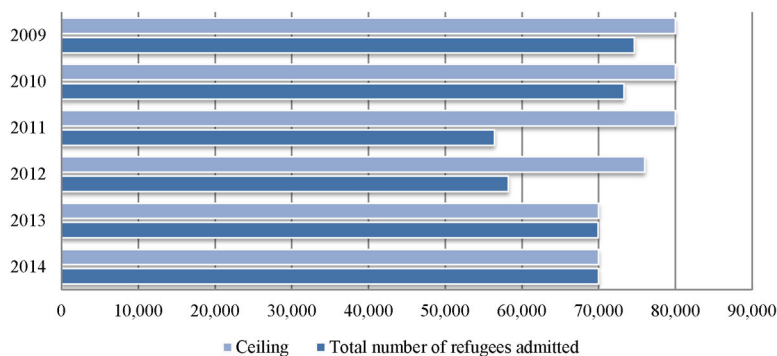
How many refugees does the U.S. admit?

Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the numerical ceiling for refugee admissions. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, the [ceiling is 70,000](#).⁶



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Refugee Ceilings and Admitted Refugees to the U.S., FY 2009-2014



(Source: [Refugee Processing Center](#)⁷; [Congressional Research Service, 2014](#)⁸)

- Almost half of all refugee arrivals ([46.4 percent](#), or 32,450) in FY 2014 came from the Near East/South Asia—a region that includes Iraq, Iran, Bhutan, and Afghanistan.⁹

How does the U.S. refugee resettlement process work?

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the Department of State and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as offices within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), are responsible for administering the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within DHS conducts refugee interviews and determines individual eligibility for refugee status in the United States.

There are [three principle categories](#) for classifying refugees under the U.S. refugee program:¹⁰

- **Priority One.** Individuals with compelling persecution needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists. These individuals are referred to the United States by UNHCR, or they are identified by a U.S. embassy or a non-governmental organization (NGO).
- **Priority Two.** Groups of “special concern” to the United States, which are selected by the Department of State with input from USCIS, UNHCR, and designated NGOs. Currently, the groups include certain persons from the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Iran, Burma, and Bhutan.
- **Priority Three.** The relatives of refugees (parents, spouses, and unmarried children under 21) who are already settled in the United States may be admitted as refugees. The



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U.S.-based relative must file an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) and must be processed by DHS.

Before admission to the United States, each refugee must undergo an extensive interviewing, screening, and security clearance process conducted by Regional Refugee Coordinators and overseas Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs). Generally, to qualify, individuals must not already be firmly resettled in any other country. Not everyone who falls into the preceding categories is admitted to the United States.

- The INA requires that the majority of prospective refugees make their individual well-founded fear cases.
 - An exception is individuals who are members of a special group that falls under the Lautenberg Amendment. The amendment [allows for a](#) “presumption of refugee eligibility for certain categories of people.”¹¹ It does not allow direct access to refugee status within the United States. Rather, if an individual can prove that they are a member of an eligible group, that group is presumed to have well-founded fear status.
- Refugees are subject to the grounds of exclusion listed in Section 212(a) of the INA, including health-related grounds, moral/criminal grounds, and security grounds. They may also be excluded for polygamy, misrepresentation of facts on visa applications, smuggling, and previous deportations. Waivers exist for certain grounds of exclusion.

After a refugee has been conditionally accepted for resettlement, the RSC sends a request for assurance of placement to the U.S., and the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) works with [private voluntary agencies](#) (VOLAG) to determine where the refugee will live in the United States.¹² Refugees resettled in the United States do not need to have a U.S. “sponsor.” However, if a refugee approved for admission does have a relative living in the United States, every effort will be made to place the refugee near his or her relative.

- If a person is accepted as a refugee for admission to the United States, it is conditioned upon the individual passing a medical examination and all security checks.
 - According to a [Human Rights First](#) report, the processing times of the U.S. refugee resettlement program “can be quite prolonged, leaving some refugees stranded in dangerous locations or in difficult circumstances.” These have improved in recent years, and in a 2012 report to Congress, the Obama Administration cited “interagency coordination and processing procedures” as one of the reasons for increased admissions.¹³

Once this assurance of placement has been secured and medical examinations and security checks have been completed, RSCs work together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to schedule and arrange refugee travel to the U.S.



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- Before leaving for the United States, refugees sign a promissory note to repay the United States for their travel costs.¹⁴ This travel loan is an interest-free loan that refugees begin to pay back six months after arriving in the United States.
- Upon receipt of IOM travel notification, the VOLAG arranges for the airport reception of refugees and transportation to their furnished housing at their final destination.

What happens once refugees arrive in the United States?

- According to [ORR](#), the states that have received the most refugees since FY 2007 are California (25,716), Michigan (18,047), Texas (12,956) and Arizona (7,447).
 - In FY 2014, new refugee arrivals went to 46 U.S. states. Top recipient states in FY 2014 were California (3,068), Michigan (2,753), Texas (2,462), Illinois (1,064) and Arizona (973).¹⁵
- A VOLAG is responsible for assuring that most services are provided during the refugee's first 90 days in the United States. They arrange for food, housing, clothing, employment counseling, medical care, and other necessities.
- One year after admission, a refugee may apply for Lawful Permanent Resident ("LPR") status. If they adjusted to LPR status, they may petition for naturalization five years after their arrival in the United States.

Refugees contribute to their new communities in the United States in many ways including education, science, politics, sports, and music.

- Bertine Bahige, [a former child soldier](#) and refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was resettled to a Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C. and moved to the University of Wyoming on a scholarship.¹⁶
 - He is now a U.S. citizen who teaches math at a high school in Gillette, Wyoming, coaches soccer, and is [currently advocating](#) for a refugee resettlement office in Wyoming, which is the only state that does not have one. "We don't always need to think about what we can give to refugees," he said. "We need to think about what refugees can bring to communities."¹⁷
- Nobel Prize winning scientists [Albert Einstein](#) and [Martin Karplus](#) both came to the United States as refugees from Nazi Europe.¹⁸
 - Albert Einstein went on to have a hand in the founding of the organization that would become the [International Rescue Committee](#), which offers care and assistance to refugees in 40 countries and 22 U.S. cities.¹⁹
- Other famous refugees [include](#) Grammy nominated musician [Regina Spektor](#), former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Representative Anh "Joseph" Quang Cao, and Olympic marathon silver medalist [Mebrahtom Keflezighi](#).²⁰



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Endnotes

- ¹ UNHCR, "[UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2012, 12th edition](#)," 10, December 2013.
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Statement of the American Immigration Lawyers Association

**Submitted to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest**

October 1, 2015 hearing

“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications”

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The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) is the national association of immigration lawyers established to promote justice and advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy. AILA has over 14,000 attorney and law professor members.

The world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with an estimated 60 million people currently forcibly displaced from their homes due to war, civil conflict, and persecution who are seeking safety either within their countries or in other countries. By itself, the civil war in Syria has forced over 4 million Syrians to flee as refugees into neighboring countries, and within Syria, nearly 12 million people are displaced internally.

In response to this global crisis, America can do more and must do more. AILA calls upon our nation’s leaders to act immediately and increase our resettlement of refugees worldwide to 200,000 for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2015. Of that total number, 100,000 should be refugees from Syria. AILA urges that the U.S. continue the robust support of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian efforts worldwide.

During this crisis the scapegoating of Muslims has unfortunately crept into the national debate, and some commentators have made unjustified claims that refugees from Syria are terrorists. We hope that members of Congress will exercise moral leadership by challenging such ugly and discriminatory views and calling for a humanitarian response that is in keeping with our nation’s commitment to welcome and protect those fleeing persecution.

As a nation, we must also protect the large numbers of people, including families and children, who are arriving on our southern borders fleeing persecution in Central America. Several members of this Committee and dozens of other leaders in Congress have challenged the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) aggressive border deterrence strategy that has resulted in the massive detention of family asylum seekers. This shameful practice must end.

Protecting Syrian refugees

Each day, thousands of Syrians make the terrifying decision to flee having borne witness to the destruction of their homes and neighborhoods, and the senseless killing of their family, friends, and

neighbors. According to the U.N., more than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Children fleeing this horrible violence are at risk of falling ill, becoming malnourished, and being abused and exploited. The perils of remaining in Syria are so great that many risk everything to make the dangerous journey to safety. In 2015, more than 2,500 refugees have died in the Mediterranean trying to attempt the journey.

On September 10, 2015, the Obama Administration pledged to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees for the fiscal year 2016. This was a welcome step, but only an initial step that must be followed by a more comprehensive plan to protect the millions in need. Other smaller and less affluent countries across the Atlantic are hosting far greater numbers of Syrian refugees, with a total of about 4 million being hosted in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Several European countries have stepped up as well, most notably Germany, which committed to accepting 35,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to Syrian asylum seekers.

The United States has the capacity to resettle at least 200,000 refugees in a single year. In 1980, the U.S. government accepted over 200,000 Vietnamese refugees, and in other years, similarly high numbers from Cuba, Northern Iraq, and Kosovo.¹ Our nation has always been a beacon of hope for those fleeing persecution and oppression, and we should accept far more than the 85,000 total refugees planned for the next year. This is the time for America to show leadership worldwide.

Rigorous security and background checks for refugees

Some commentators have recommended that the United States place additional restrictions on the refugee resettlement program to ensure national security and public safety. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has implemented a detailed and rigorous security screening process for all refugees who are candidates for resettlement to the United States. These security protocols are extremely rigorous, and it is unnecessary for Congress to mandate additional measures.

First, refugees are referred to the U.S. by the UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or a trained non-governmental organization. Refugees then undergo a series of biometric and investigatory background checks, including collection and analysis of personal data, fingerprints, photographs, and other background information, all of which is checked against government databases. All refugees must also appear for a detailed interview by trained DHS personnel. Where any security concerns exist, refugees must undergo additional screening by way of a Security Advisory Opinion, which requires clearance from multiple U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies before resettlement may be approved.

Stopping fearmongering against Muslims

In the media and public discourse, a dangerous sentiment against those of Muslim faith is taking hold. Some have suggested that the U.S. refugee resettlement program should exclude Muslims outright or prioritize other religious groups. Such a change to our laws and traditions would be a terrible mistake. Restricting refugee protection to certain faiths would be inconsistent with U.S. and international asylum law which do not discriminate against any religious group. Exclusion of Muslims from the U.S. resettlement program would leave thousands of people who have suffered horrific violence and persecution at the hands of ISIS or other warring factions without humanitarian protection. We call upon Congress to demonstrate leadership by speaking out against the scapegoating of any group during this time of crisis.

AILA supports the “Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015” (H.R. 1568) which would give especially vulnerable Syrian refugees direct access to the U.S. Refugee Admission Process while enforcing security measures currently in place. AILA also supports efforts to increase the capacity

¹ The United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980.

of DHS and the Department of State to process security and background checks for Syrian and other refugees so they can be efficiently cleared for resettlement.

America must ensure humanitarian protection for refugees arriving on our borders

In addition to aiding Syrian and other refugees that are overseas, the U.S. has a responsibility to protect those who come to our borders, in particular those from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala who are fleeing persecution and violence that qualifies them as refugees. For the past several years the escalating violent crime, gang violence and domestic violence that has raged beyond control within those countries has resulted in thousands of children and families fleeing and seeking refuge in the United States and other countries in the region.

In initial interviews with government asylum officers, these individuals are qualifying as refugees at extremely high rates, demonstrating that they should be protected under U.S. asylum laws. For example, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data shows that the vast majority – nearly 90 percent – of detained families have established that they have bona fide claims for asylum or other protection under U.S. law. Further indication of the strength and veracity of their claims is the extremely high success rate of asylum grants when the women and children have their cases finally reviewed by immigration judges.

Instead of welcoming them and ensuring their safety, since summer 2014, DHS has embarked on a deterrence strategy that is intended to show force on the border and turn back these asylum seekers. The DHS strategy has included rapid, so-called “expeditious,” deportations that have abrogated due process protections and in many cases resulted in the unlawful return of women and children without giving them the meaningful opportunity to seek asylum. The principle of non-*refoulement*, under Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, protects both refugees and asylum seekers by prohibiting states from returning them to territories where there is a risk that their life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. As a country, we must ensure that fundamental protections are provided to asylum seekers, and that instead of being intimidated and turned back, they are treated in a dignified and humane manner.

Under U.S. law, individuals facing deportation, including children and family asylum seekers, are still not guaranteed counsel paid for by the government, even for those who are indigent and have little or no understanding of our laws. In some cases, the government places such onerous restrictions on volunteers and pro bono lawyers who are trying to assist families in detention that meaningful assistance of counsel is effectively denied. Since July 2014, AILA lawyer members from across the country have volunteered in New Mexico, Texas, and Pennsylvania at family detention facilities and, in early 2015, AILA established the CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project in partnership with other legal service providers to assist families in detention in Texas. Despite the private, in-kind nature of these volunteer efforts made by hundreds of lawyers and professionals, DHS has repeatedly obstructed the ability of counsel to speak with detainees – including detainees whom the government knows to be represented by counsel – for legal consultation at family detention facilities. DHS has also employed coercive tactics that undermine the ability of these detained asylum seekers to assert their rights, including, in at least one instance, going from cell-to-cell demanding the names of detainees who spoke with their lawyers about their concerns regarding the terms of their release, telling the detainees that lawyers have nothing to do with the matter.

Finally, as part of its border deterrence strategy, the U.S. government has dramatically increased the use of detention against families and currently is incarcerating more than 2,000 children and mothers who are seeking asylum and other protection under U.S. law. Private for-profit prison companies run the two largest family detention facilities and now hold contracts for the only alternatives to detention programs DHS offers. Daily, our volunteers and staff are helping these families and are bearing witness to the

suffering borne by these mothers and children – some breastfeeding infants – including severe loss of weight, psychological trauma, and inadequate medical treatment. AILA and other organizations have sent formal complaints to the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties documenting these and other deleterious consequences of the Administration’s family detention policy.

Instead of being subjected to detention and expedited removal procedures that limit their ability to seek counsel and adequately present their claims, these families should be placed into the regular removal process, given the opportunity to tell their story to an immigration judge and released from physical detention so they can join the families and friends who are willing to support them while they prepare their cases.

The mass incarceration of asylum seekers not only violates our country’s laws but also contradicts America’s most cherished principles and values. We call upon Congress and the Administration to end family detention.

The United States needs to open its doors to those fleeing from persecution and violence whether they fled from war in Syria, or from gangs, rape, or domestic violence in Honduras, Guatemala, or El Salvador. No matter from which shore, country or continent these refugees have fled, America must stand behind our laws and guarantee them humanitarian protection.



Written Testimony of
Asylum Access, an International Refugee Rights Nonprofit
www.asylumaccess.org

Hearing Before the
United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration

**“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
 Fiscal and Security Implications”**

October 1, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the important topic of the role of the United States refugee resettlement program in securing safety, dignity and rights for the millions of refugees in the world.

I. BACKGROUND

Asylum Access is an international human rights organization dedicated to improving implementation of refugees’ human rights in countries of first asylum across Africa, Asia and Latin America. We provide legal information, advice, and representation to around 20,000 refugees each year in six countries – Ecuador, Panama, Mexico, Thailand, Malaysia, and Tanzania – and advocate for national, regional, and global policies that better implement and safeguard refugees’ fundamental rights to live safely, move freely, work, attend school, and build new lives as contributing members of their new homes.

Through our work, we track and assess global trends and truths about refugees and their relationships to asylum states.

The world currently confronts the largest forced displacement in recorded history.¹ More people are displaced today as a result of persecution, conflict and war than ever before – nearly 60 million, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Around one-third of them – nearly 20 million people – have been forced entirely out of their home countries, and thus are refugees.²

Most of Asylum Access’s refugee clients will never reach the United States, as less than 1% of all refugees are resettled to the U.S., Europe, Canada and Australia combined each year. Because of this, Asylum Access spends much of our time working to ensure that refugees have access to meaningful rights in countries of first asylum. We repeatedly hear from our clients that they want two things: the power and opportunity to meet their own needs rather than indefinitely depending on aid; and the ability to contribute to their communities in the countries that have become their new homes.

¹ UNHCR, *Worldwide displacement hits an all-time high as war and persecution increase* (June 18, 2015). <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>.

² UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014* (2014). <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

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As the Senate considers the fiscal and security implications of refugee resettlement, this committee is urged to take into account two key realities: First, refugees typically contribute to their new homes in measures that far exceed the initial investment required to resettle them. Forty percent of U.S. Fortune 500 companies today were started by refugees and immigrants or their children.³

Second, U.S. and global security threats may heighten when refugees are locked in closed refugee camps for decades, are prohibited from seeking jobs or starting businesses, and are denied access to safe, lawful employment opportunities in countries of first asylum. The U.S. should demonstrate a genuine commitment to share the responsibility of responding to unprecedented global displacement, or we will lack the necessary leverage and moral authority to successfully ask countries of first asylum to provide viable alternatives to irregular and secondary migration.

II. REFUGEES: POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Asylum Access's experience around the world – including in countries where refugees make up a significantly higher percentage of the overall population – strongly suggest the U.S. has the capacity to effectively integrate substantially larger numbers of refugees than currently allotted. Further, our observation of common trends across all our regions of operation illuminates the potential for the U.S. to reap economic and other benefits from accepting a substantially higher number of refugees for resettlement.

a. Refugees benefit the economy

Refugees have a positive economic impact on their asylum states. Studies of refugees' economic impact have repeatedly found that where refugees are allowed to lawfully access the economy – in other words, not closed off in camps for decades or legally barred from seeking employment – their net economic impact has been positive.⁴

While this is true even in relatively fragile economies, like those of Uganda⁵ and Ecuador,⁶ it is a well-documented phenomenon in the United States. For example, refugees who arrived in the US during the period 1975-1980 earned 20% more than other immigrants a decade later, in 1990.⁷

b. Refugees are job creators

Refugees are natural job creators, as recent studies around the world demonstrate.⁸ In the U.S., forty percent of our Fortune 500 companies were founded by refugees and immigrants or their children.⁹ This is one reason 18 US mayors have asked that the U.S. resettle more refugees in their communities.¹⁰

³ Stuart Anderson, *40 Percent of Fortune 500 Companies Founded by Immigrants or Their Children*, *Forbes* (June 19, 2011). <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2011/06/19/40-percent-of-fortune-500-companies-founded-by-immigrants-or-their-children/>.

⁴ Ana Swanson, *The Big Myth About Refugees*, *The Washington Post* (Sept. 10, 2015). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/09/10/the-big-myth-about-refugees/>. See also Alexander Betts et al, *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre (June 2014). <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/refugee-economies-2014.pdf>.

⁵ See eg, *Refugee Economies*.

⁶ See, eg, Asylum Access, *To Have Work Is To Have Life* (June 2011).

⁷ Kalena Cortes, *Are Refugees Different from Economic Immigrants?* (March 2004). http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=524605.



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c. Lessons for the U.S. from around the globe

Uganda

In 2014, the University of Oxford released the study: *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*. The study is based on extensive qualitative and quantitative research conducted in Uganda, which examined the economic lives of refugees in the country. In short, the study revealed that Uganda's economy has benefited from the daily economic lives of refugees who were permitted to work and self-employ legally in the country.

Refugees granted access to the labor market in Uganda:

- "...often make a positive contribution to the host state economy. These contributions are exemplified by the significant volume of exchange between refugees and Ugandan nationals, as well as by refugees' creation of employment opportunities for Ugandan nationals."¹¹
- Satisfy market demands through the supply of goods and services to Ugandans.¹²
- Are a strong customer base of many Ugandan businesses, purchasing both daily household goods and essential supplies to support their own livelihood activities.¹³
- Have well-established trade-connections both within Uganda and East Africa, increasing cross-border trade and diversifying markets.
- Create "centers of economic gravity, attracting people and capital from all over Uganda and, in turn, playing a crucial role in the agriculture supply chain of the country."¹⁴
- Have a proven ability to become successful entrepreneurs, building sustainable businesses that train and employ Ugandan nationals.¹⁵

Though resettlement to the U.S. involves in initial investment in refugee integration, the economic activities of refugees and their families have enormous potential for our country.

Ecuador

While refugee arrivals to the U.S. during the Great Recession were too small to yield useful data, Ecuador offers an interesting case study: Ecuador, where refugees make up 1% of the population, granted them equal access to

⁸ See, eg, *The Big Myth About Refugees*.

⁹ *40 Percent of Fortune 500 Companies Founded by Immigrants of Their Children*.

¹⁰ Elise Foley, *18 U.S. Mayors to Obama: We'll Take Even More Refugees*, Huffington Post (Sept 24, 2015).

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mayors-letter-refugees-obama_56044aefe4b08820d91c1b86.

¹¹ *Refugee Economies* at pg. 5.

¹² *Ibid* at 11.

¹³ *Ibid* at 16, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid* at 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid* at 14, 16.



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employment opportunities and workplace rights in September 2008. Ecuador subsequently saw its economy grow every year for the next five years, in the midst of the worst global economic recession since the 1930s.¹⁶

Asylum Access studied refugees' economic participation in Ecuador. We found refugees filling gaps in the economy and creating – and filling – new markets and services, contributing to economic growth. When we surveyed refugees to understand what motivated them as workers and as business owners, we learned that those whose lives have been uprooted, disrupted by violence and trauma, are highly motivated to restore their self-reliance, their agency, and their sense of purpose and community. They are motivated by a strong drive to provide for their families, but they are also motivated by a desire to have a purpose and place as contributing members of society. As one refugee we interviewed said, “to have work is to have life.”

The values and drive that we found when we interviewed refugees – and that we see in our refugee clients all over the world – are highly consistent with American values. By resettling refugees to the U.S., we are building our national economic strength.

III. SHARE RESPONSIBILITY AS A MEANS OF STABILIZATION

Asylum Access's experience with refugee populations facing longstanding barriers to employment and opportunity has also led us to understand deeply the connection between U.S. resettlement policies and irregular movement by refugees seeking opportunity.

a. Restrictive countries of first asylum can lead to irregular onward migration

Half of all refugees today are in “protracted refugee situations” involving displacement of 25,000 or more.¹⁷ Most protracted refugee situations today have lasted at least 25 years.¹⁸ For those refugees, that's 25 years without the right to work and feed your family, without the ability to attend school or build a career. At the same time, aid funding is running out, so rations are routinely cut back. In Jordan and Lebanon this summer, the World Food Programme cut refugees' rations in half due to funding shortfalls.¹⁹

Refugees in many countries of first asylum are faced with a Catch-22: They can't lawfully work to feed their families, and international aid is running low as crises continue. As a result, some resort to secondary migration, often using irregular or illicit channels to leave a country of first asylum. (We've seen this starkly in recent weeks as refugees who initially sought asylum in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan or Egypt leave those countries and attempt to reach Europe.) Others are recruited into armed groups that promise food, opportunity, and the possibility of a future.²⁰

¹⁶ Emily Arnold-Fernandez, Stewart Pollock, *Refugees' rights to work* (Sept 2013).

<http://www.fmreview.org/detention/arnoldfernandez-pollock>.

¹⁷ UNHCR *Global Trends 2014*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Reuters, *Short of Cash, U.N. Cuts Syria Refugees' rations again* (Jul 1, 2015). <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/01/us-mideast-crisis-syria-rations-idUSKCN0PB4LP20150701>.

²⁰ See, eg, Human Rights Watch, *Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die* (June 22, 2014).

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>.



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b. U.S. refugee resettlement is needed for regional stability and to maintain leadership

Preventing onward migration and the risks created by a stagnant population requires that countries of first asylum grant refugees the rights to move freely, seek work and start businesses. The U.S. plays a powerful role in urging countries of first asylum to take these steps.

For the U.S. to be successful in such diplomacy, however, it must demonstrate a real commitment to sharing in the responsibility for refugee response. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon each host between 1.5 and 2 million mostly-Syrian refugees. As of June 2015, the U.S. had accepted fewer than 900 Syrian refugees since 2011.²¹ While the U.S. will never receive a large percentage of the world's Syrian refugees, its current resettlement levels are so low as to appear absurd in comparison to Syria's neighbors.

To effectively aid in regional stabilization, and to advocate for policies that will protect the U.S. and the world against subsequent security risks, the U.S. must increase its resettlement commitments so that it meaningfully shares in the global response to forced displacement. Annually resettling 100,000 Syrian refugees and an additional 100,000 refugees from other parts of the world is an important step toward achieving this goal.

Only when the U.S. shares in the global obligation to offer meaningful asylum – including integrating refugees into the workforce and economy – will it have the necessary leverage and moral authority to successfully ask countries of first asylum to offer refugees such opportunities within their own countries. Only when countries of first asylum give refugees the chance to move freely, seek work and start businesses will we see a reduction in irregular secondary migration, with all the security risks such irregular movement entails.

²¹ Factcheck, *Resettling Syrian Refugees* (June 4, 2015). <http://www.factcheck.org/2015/06/resettling-syrian-refugees/>.





**Statement Submitted by the Center for Victims of Torture to the
U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications
October 1, 2015**

The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for this timely and important hearing on the U.S. refugee resettlement program for FY 2016. CVT provides healing services to survivors of torture and severe war atrocities at its clinics in the United States, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia and engages in training and capacity building initiatives in support of torture survivor rehabilitation programs worldwide.

As the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest reviews the U.S. refugee resettlement program for FY 2016, CVT urges the distinguished members of the Subcommittee to reflect upon the mission and goals of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and the global context within which it is operating. It is based upon these considerations, which are explained in greater detail below, that CVT has joined a diverse coalition of humanitarian aid, human rights, faith based and refugee service organizations in calling for the United States to commit to resettling 200,000 refugees in FY 2016, with 100,000 of them being Syrian.¹ Likewise, CVT continues to call for increased investments in specialized trauma rehabilitation services for refugee survivors of torture in the United States, as an estimated 44% of the refugees in the United States are survivors of torture.² Given the long-term impacts of torture on individuals, their families, and communities, it is essential that appropriate services are available to help refugee survivors of torture as they seek to integrate into their new lives and communities in the United States.

Global Refugee Context

In its most recent report on Global Trends, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) revealed that 59.5 million individuals worldwide are forcibly displaced "as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations."³ UNHCR noted "[t]his is 8.3 million persons more than the year before (51.2 million) and the highest annual increase in a single year."⁴

The report further explained that the international community has been failing to attain solutions to ongoing conflicts or prevent new conflicts from erupting or reigniting. Meanwhile, states and the international community have also been failing to protect individuals from threats and violence from

¹ NGO letter to President Obama, September 18, 2015,

<http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/members/Syrian%20Resettlement%20Sign-On%20Letter%209.18.15.pdf>.

² Higson-Smith, Craig, "Updating the Estimate of Refugees Resettled in the United States who Have Suffered Torture," The Center for Victims of Torture, September 29, 2015,

http://www.cvt.org/sites/cvt.org/files/SurvivorNumberMetaAnalysis_Sept2015.pdf.

³ UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014," <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html>, 2.

⁴ Id.

non-state actors, such as with children being targeted by gangs in Central America or with the power and reach of ruthless terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, al Shabab, the so-called Islamic State and countless other active organizations or militias. Consequently, in 2014 only 126,800 refugees were able to return to their home countries. This was the lowest number in 31 years.⁵

The dire reality is that, globally, as the number of forcibly displaced persons rises to levels unseen since the end of World War II, humanitarian needs are growing without corresponding increases in funding or international responsibility-sharing. The responsibility has primarily been shouldered by other war torn, impoverished or politically unstable countries.⁶ And the numbers are staggering: Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan alone are hosting over 3.5 million registered refugees, mostly from Syria.⁷ Pakistan is hosting 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees.⁸ Ethiopia and Kenya combined are hosting 1.2 million registered refugees from various countries in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa, including Somalis.⁹

The United States has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees and offering safe haven to those fleeing persecution. However, as forced displacement globally has been rising, U.S. generosity has not kept pace. There are three classic “durable” solutions for refugees—return, local integration and resettlement. When return is not a viable option due to ongoing conflict or violence and local integration is impossible, in part, because host countries are overwhelmed by the number of refugees within their borders, third country resettlement must function in a more robust and efficient manner. However, less than 1% of the world’s refugees are referred for third country resettlement.¹⁰ In FY 2013, the Department of Homeland Security reported that the United States admitted 70,000 persons as refugees through USRAP.¹¹ While 70,000 represented approximately half of UNHCR’s resettlement referrals, this only represented .001 of the total number of people forcibly displaced in the same period of time. The recent announcement by the Obama Administration of its intention to resettle 85,000 refugees in FY 2016, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees, is a step forward but given the scale and severity of refugee needs globally, it is still far more modest than the number of people the United States can and should welcome.¹²

Recommendation: The United States should commit to resettling 200,000 refugees in FY 2016 with 100,000 of them being from Syria.

⁵ Id at 3.

⁶ UNHCR, World Refugee Day: UNHCR report finds 80 per cent of world’s refugees in developing countries, June 20, 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/4dfb66ef9.html>.

⁷ UNHCR, 2015 Sub-regional Operations Profile—Middle East, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45ade6.html>; UNHCR, 2015 Country Operations Profile—Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f&submit=GO>.

⁸ UNHCR, 2015 Country Operations Profile—Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e487016&submit=GO>.

⁹ UNHCR, 2015 Country Operations Profile—Kenya, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e483a16&submit=GO>; UNHCR, 2015 Country Operations Profile—Ethiopia, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e483986&submit=GO>.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration: Refugee Admissions, <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/>.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Annual Flow Report: Refugees and Asylees 2013, http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_rfa_fr_2013.pdf. Note that an additional 25,000 refugees were granted asylum protection in the United States during the same time frame.

¹² U.S. Department of State Official Blog, “Secretary Kerry Announces U.S. Will Increase Refugee Resettlement Numbers,” September 20, 2015, <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2015/09/20/secretary-kerry-announces-us-will-increase-refugee-resettlement-numbers>.

Torture Survivors Resettled to the United States

Recognizing that third-country resettlement is available to less than 1% of the world's refugees, the eligibility criteria and scrutiny is quite rigid at each stage.¹³ In making a referral for resettlement, UNHCR first assesses an individual refugee for heightened vulnerability based upon its submission criteria.¹⁴ Categories for submission include (i) legal and/or physical protection needs of the refugee in the country of refuge; (ii) survivors of torture and/or violence; (iii) medical needs, in particular when life-saving treatment is unavailable in the country of refuge; (iv) women and girls at risk; (v) family reunification; (vi) children and adolescents at risk; and (vii) lack of a foreseeable alternative durable solution.¹⁵ Prior to making a resettlement referral, UNHCR conducts thorough background checks and evaluates whether any of the exclusion clauses or bars to refugee status apply. By simply being referred for resettlement by UNHCR, refugees under consideration have already undergone screening that has determined they are among the most vulnerable and not a security risk.

The United States does not rely entirely upon UNHCR evaluations in deciding to accept refugees. A UNHCR referral is only one step in a lengthy and thorough process. Refugees resettled to the United States all undergo a series of meticulous security screenings conducted by the U.S. government. These checks include multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies including the National Counterterrorism Center and National Security Council. As a result, refugees are the most thoroughly screened people to travel into the United States.

USRAP seeks to prioritize for resettlement the most vulnerable and those with the greatest humanitarian need. Annually, among the refugees who meet that criteria are thousands of survivors of torture and their families who are being given a chance to rebuild their lives in the United States. Torture survivors come from all walks of life and corners of the globe. Some were journalists or pro-democracy activists who were targeted by oppressive regimes for their activities, while some were targeted for trying to practice their religion or live in accordance with their own sexual orientation or gender identity. Others were punished because of the activities or identities of family members or friends, while others were targeted for providing humanitarian assistance. Some were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Amnesty International found cases of torture committed by government officials in 141 countries between January 2009 and May 2013.¹⁶

For nearly 20 years, CVT has estimated that 400,000 – 500,000 refugee torture survivors live in the United States. However, based upon a meta-analysis of previous research studies, CVT has concluded that the number of refugee torture survivors in the United States could be nearly three times the previous estimate, making the refugee torture prevalence rate as high as 44 percent. Applying this percentage to the more than 3 million refugees who have arrived in the U.S. since 1975, the number of refugee torture survivors in the United States could be as high as 1.3 million without including the

¹³ Note that not all refugees who are resettled to the United States are referred through UNHCR; however, given that the majority of resettled refugees are referred by UNHCR, this statement focuses on that process.

¹⁴ UNHCR, Resettlement Handbook, Chapter Six: UNHCR Resettlement Submission Categories. <http://www.unhcr.org/3d464e842.html>.

¹⁵ Id at 243.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, "Torture in 2014: 30 Years of Broken Promises," <http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/act400042014en.pdf>, 11.

number of torture survivors who have been granted asylum status or other forms of immigration relief.¹⁷

Torture is the intentional infliction of severe pain and suffering, physical or psychological, upon another individual. Survivors report being subjected to severe beatings, rape, deprivation, and witness to murder and torture of family members. These experiences commonly lead survivors to demonstrate symptoms such as chronic pain in muscles and joints, headaches, incessant nightmares and other sleep disorders, stomach pain and nausea, severe depression and anxiety, guilt, self-hatred, the inability to concentrate, thoughts of suicide and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Studies suggest that 40-50% of refugees who survived torture experience posttraumatic stress disorder and/or major depressive disorder and thus often require mental health care to facilitate effective integration into communities and economies.¹⁸

Effective torture survivor rehabilitation programs are able to address a survivor's physical, psychological, legal and social needs to reduce their suffering and restore functioning as quickly as possible. There are more than 40 specialized torture survivor rehabilitation programs operating in 25 states and the District of Columbia. However, all of these programs are under-resourced, under-staffed and face demands that far exceed capacity. Thus, current programming is only meeting a small fraction of the people in need and greater investments are required in order to ensure that survivors of torture have access to this lifesaving assistance.

Recommendation: Congress should increase funding to the Office of Refugee Resettlement Survivor of Torture program and pass the Torture Victims Relief Act of 2015, a bi-partisan bill championed by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ/4th).

For questions about this statement, contact Annie Sovcik, Director of the Washington Office at the Center for Victims of Torture at asovcik@cvt.org; 202-822-0188.

¹⁷ See *supra* at 10.

¹⁸ Steel Z, Chey T, Silove D, Marnane C, Bryant RA, van Ommeren M., "Association of torture and other potentially traumatic events with mental health outcomes among populations exposed to mass conflict and displacement: a systematic review and meta-analysis," *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, August 2009, abstract available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19654388>.

**MEMORANDUM**

**CRCNA Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, pertaining to its hearing
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program
Thursday, October 1, 2015**

As Executive Director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I would like to express my concern for the current Syrian refugee crisis and my support for the 4 million Syrian refugees in search of safety. With this community of faith leaders, I call on President Obama to admit 100,000 Syrian refugees of all faiths this year, in addition to the annual Presidential Determination.

The U.S. refugee program is an important private public partnership between government and faith communities. Faith-based agencies and community organizations have a powerful legacy of support for refugee resettlement and assistance. If faith communities are to continue this legacy, the government needs to recognize the crisis and do their part as well.

I appreciate this statement made by Pope Francis to a gathering at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, D.C., Wednesday on the role of the church: "The Church in the United States knows like few others the hopes present in the hearts of these 'pilgrims.' . . . From the beginning you have learned their languages, promoted their cause, made their contributions your own, defended their rights, helped them to prosper, and kept alive the flame of their faith. . . . Even today, no American institution does more for immigrants than your Christian communities."

The Christian Reformed Church has a long history of welcoming the vulnerable and helping to resettle refugees in safe communities. The CRCNA pledges to fully participate in resettling Syrians of all religions during this current crisis as it has done with refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steve Timmermans
Executive Director, CRCNA

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**CWS Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, pertaining to its hearing
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program
Thursday, October 1, 2015**

Church World Service (CWS), a 69-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox communions and 33 refugee resettlement offices across the country, works to assist refugees through international protection and by providing resettlement services to help refugees adjust to their new lives and integrate in the United States.

The United States is one of 28 countries that resettles refugees. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a public-private partnership that helps rescue refugees who have no other means of finding safety. To be considered a refugee, individuals must prove that they have fled persecution due to their nationality, ethnicity, religion, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Refugees face three options: return to their home country, integrate in the country to which they first fled or be resettled to a third country. For the millions who are unable to return home due to significant threats to their safety and rejection by the country to which they first fled, resettlement is the last resort. While less than one percent of the world's estimated 19.5 million refugees are resettled to a third country, resettlement saves lives and also helps encourage other countries to provide durable solutions for refugees within their borders, including local integration.

Today, there are over 60 million people displaced around the world, the highest number since World War II. The United States resettled less than 70,000 refugees this past fiscal year, a small number in proportion to the U.S. population that should be increased, especially given the conflict in Syria and the global need. Secretary of State John Kerry has announced plans for the United States to resettle 85,000 refugees in fiscal year 2016 and 100,000 in fiscal year 2017. This increase is modest, and not without precedent. During World War II, the United States admitted more than 650,000 displaced Europeans, and following the fall of Saigon, annual resettlement numbers ranged from 100,000 to more than 200,000 throughout the 1980s.

The refugee resettlement program is the most difficult way to enter the United States, routinely taking individuals longer than 1,000 days to be processed. Security measures are intrinsic to the integrity of the refugee program, and over the years, the U.S. government has continuously fine-tuned the system to maximize domestic security. All refugees undergo thorough and rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the United States, including but not limited to multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of applicants' fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center, and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. In addition, mandatory supervisory review of all decisions; random case assignment; inter-agency national security teams; trained document experts; forensic testing of documents; and interpreter monitoring are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program. Thus, refugees are the most scrutinized individuals to travel to the United States.

U.S. communities, schools, congregations, and employers welcome refugees and help them integrate in their new homes. In turn, refugees contribute to their new communities with their innovative skills, dedicated work, and inspiring perseverance. Through the Matching Grant Program, 80% of refugees find employment and become self-sufficient within their first four to six months in the United States, an impressive success rate during an economic downturn and given the difficulty of learning a new language and rebuilding one's life in a new country. Studies conducted on the economic impact of refugee resettlement show that refugees provide substantial contributions to the workforce and to local economic development. Many refugees are highly skilled and obtained high levels of education in their home countries. Additionally, refugees frequently begin successful business ventures after resettling in the United States and participate in civic engagement activities to give back to their new communities. With their entrepreneurship and purchasing power, refugees economically revitalize U.S. communities.

Currently, Syria is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis the world has seen in twenty years, with approximately four million refugees and eight million internally displaced persons. Roughly three-quarters of those displaced are women and children. Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt currently host more than three million Syrian refugees. While this crisis is complex and requires a variety of solutions, refugee resettlement plays a strategic role in alleviating pressure on host countries in the region, demonstrating international leadership, and providing durable solutions and opportunities for a new life for vulnerable populations fleeing persecution. Many European countries have welcomed Syrians through resettlement and humanitarian admissions schemes, including Germany pledging to accept one million Syrians. In proportion to each country's population, this would be akin to the United States accepting more than three million Syrian refugees. While traditionally a world leader in refugee resettlement, the United States has resettled less than 1,700 Syrian refugees.

CWS and partners in Refugee Council USA are calling on President Obama to admit 100,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to the annual resettlement numbers. CWS also calls on Congress to support resettlement as a lifesaving program and affirm the need to increase the resettlement of Syrian refugees during this time of crisis. CWS stands committed to working with both chambers of Congress and the Administration to resettle Syrian refugees as part of our foreign policy interests and humanitarian responsibilities. We urge all Members of Congress to support these efforts to provide safety to vulnerable refugees from Syria and beyond.



COLUMBAN CENTER FOR ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

Statement for the Record on “Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications”

Senate Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest

October 1, 2015

By Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

The Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach (CCAO) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. CCAO is the national advocacy office for the Missionary Society of St. Columban.

Columban Missionaries are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges and create mutual understanding through dialogue which is expressed through our solidarity with marginalized people and the exploited. Since 2000 the Missionary Society of St. Columban committed itself in a special way to “continue accompanying and defending the rights of migrants and refugees,” and to address the underlying causes of the migration of peoples.

Columban missionaries around the world are heartbroken and outraged by the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing Europe and the world in the waves of refugees coming from the Middle East and Africa. Columbans serve economically poor and marginalized communities in the United States and globally, often in countries plagued by injustice, armed conflict, and religious, inter-ethnic or political persecution. These conditions drive people away from their homes in search of refuge. We believe that we are called to both serve the needs of migrants and refugees everywhere, and to address the root causes of migration so that people and their families have the choice to remain at home.

CCAO joins the call to increase the refugee ceiling to 200,000 for FY 16, with 100,000 of those refugees coming from Syria. We have a responsibility to offer a robust welcome to our refugee sisters and brothers. Columbans across the globe witness the pain and suffering of refugees forced from their homes and we call on Congress to remember Pope Francis’s message of compassion, “Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities.”

“Pope Francis urges us to offer ‘concrete hope’,” said **Columban Superior General, Fr. Kevin O’Neill**. “For Columban missionaries, this means welcoming the stranger in our parishes and mission centers. We also advocate for national and international policies that address root causes of migration such as violent conflict and environmental and economic injustice. We take heed of the Pope’s Angelus address of Sept 6th 2015, when he called for a ‘concrete gesture’ ahead of a Jubilee Year of Mercy starting in December, calling on every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary in Europe (to) take in a family.’ ”



COLUMBAN CENTER FOR ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

Columbans have served refugees and asylum seekers in England for decades. Of the current crisis, **Mauricio Silva, Columban Lay Missionary Coordinator** in the UK said, “We are more committed than ever to serving the needs of refugees and asylum seekers and pray that this crisis will bring to people’s attention the plight of so many victims of wars, violence, poverty and abuse of Creation.”

Scott Wright, Director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach in the U.S. says it is not just Europe that must respond but our country as well, “The response of the United States has been woefully inadequate, especially since the US has been so directly involved in more than a decade of war in the Middle East. For Christians, it means taking seriously the biblical mandate “to welcome” our Muslim sisters and brothers and to work urgently for peace in the Middle East.”

Read more on the Columban position on migration here: <http://www.columbans.co.uk/news/jpic-policy-statements-of-the-columban-missionary-society/>.

If you have any questions about this statement, please contact Scott Wright, Director, at swright@columban.org or 202-635-5810.



DISCIPLES HOME MISSIONS STATEMENT
TO THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, FOR THE HEARING ON:
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program
Thursday, October 1, 2016

As a North American Christian faith movement of over 600,000 which was birthed on the American frontier, our congregations have long cherished the principle of freedom of religion for communities of all backgrounds. We are grateful to be part of a faith tradition that has spoken again and again of our key faith value of welcoming the stranger despite religious or cultural background. Since the time of WWII, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada has worked through our Disciples Home Missions office of Refugee and Immigration Ministries, and in partnership with 33 Church World Service refugee affiliate offices, to resettle over 40,000 refugees in the past six decades.

Now, in these days when our world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II, we reaffirm strongly our readiness to continue to embrace refugees, and to welcome them without exclusion. We are ready to do so because we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Indeed, in light of the reality of over 60 million displaced persons and 20 million refugees in the world, we urge congress to support a greatly increased number of refugee arrivals in the coming years. We are aware that Secretary of State Kerry has requested the U.S. to resettle 85,000 overall refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017. Instead, we strive for a greater goal of hospitality—one which our history has shown is attainable through strong community and government partnerships. We believe that, just as the U.S. admitted over 650,000 European refugees during WWII, and between 100,000-200,000 Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade and a half after the Vietnam War, the U.S. should now admit 100,000 Syrians and an additional 100,000 refugees of other backgrounds into our nation beginning in 2016.

In our international partnerships in mission, we have consistently observed families struggling desperately to stay together, and even to remain alive, because of the spiral of violence in their homelands. We see many Christians persecuted. But we likewise see persecution of Muslims, of Jews, and of families of other faiths. All populations have desperate needs, and are worthy of our resettlement and welcome. As we support relationships of peace and solidarity across religious divides internationally, we are absolutely opposed to any legislation here in the U.S. that would prioritize Christian refugees at the expense or rejection of Muslim refugees and individuals of other faiths. Instead, we must lead the world with our great capacity for hospitality.

Welcoming refugees who are our world's most vulnerable people to this land of the free should never require a religious litmus test to step onto our shores. Rather, we must counter anti-Muslim sentiment at every turn—allowing us to offer protection to Syrian refugees. By so doing, we will welcome opportunities for relationship with hard working doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, coaches, pastors, imams. And we can know that each one to whom we offer our hands—after years of suffering—is grateful for life, and ready to pour potential into our communities, to be ambassadors of the American Dream, and to help us live out our principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

America today is being called to fish from a different side of the boat – the side of abundant generosity and welcome – for the sake all our sisters and brothers fleeing persecution and loss of life in Syria. Let us cast our nets over to this other side and be blessed as a world leader whose compassion reaches from the halls of government out to the streets where fleeing refugees are crying for help. There is a moral challenge directly before us. Our congregations are calling us constantly, expressing their willingness to help house, teach English, mentor, employ, and surround the world's most vulnerable people. Members of Congress, we urge you to do all you can to open these doors of opportunities for the world's most vulnerable persons. What are we waiting for?



Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

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Empowering refugees and immigrants since 1983

Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

Statement for the Record on

“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications”

Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest

Thursday, October 1, 2015

The Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc. (ECDC) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and its fiscal and security implications. Since 1983, ECDC has been committed to serving the uprooted and helping them establish new homes and lives with their families in the United States. In the past year, we have resettled over 5,000 refugees, and we look forward to resettling more in the coming fiscal year.

Throughout our history, the United States has been one of the world leaders in refugee and immigrant resettlement and protection, and we welcomed many newcomers into our communities, schools, congregations, and places of employment. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a crucial partnership between public and private agencies and organizations that gives hope to so many who have no other means of finding safety. These refugees, defined by their flight of persecution due to nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, are victims of the crises their home countries endure.

Though there are fiscal and security concerns associated with resettling victims of the current refugee crisis, we are confident in the ability of the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to uphold our top-security vetting programs for incoming refugees and immigrants. We understand that there will be challenges our country will have to face, but we hope the United States government will not lose focus on the priceless cost of saving so many lives.

“For many years, the U.S. government has been at the forefront of humanitarian crisis relief and resettlement of refugees and welcoming of immigrants,” ECDC President Tsehaye Teferra said. “We appreciate the government’s commitment to this crucially important issue, and we hope to see this tradition of helping others continue in the coming years.”

ECDC urges the administration to continue to welcome refugees and asylum seekers impacted by the Syrian conflict and to ensure access to resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees and populations. We are committed to working with both chambers of Congress and the Administration to resettle the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, and we urge members of Congress to support these efforts to provide safety to vulnerable refugees from Syria and beyond.

**Evangelical
Immigration
Table**

Bread for the World

Christian Community
Development Association

Council for Christian Colleges
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern
Baptist Convention

National Association of
Evangelicals

National Hispanic Christian
Leadership Conference

Sojourners

World Relief

World Vision

October 1, 2015

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
United States Senate
326 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sessions and Ranking Member Schumer:

In recent weeks, the headlines have been dominated by the global refugee crisis. Today, there are more than 50 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people in the world, a higher number than at any time since World War II. The conflict in Syria alone has forced approximately 4 million individuals to flee the country, with millions more displaced internally: fully half of the Syrian population has been forced to flee their homes. Meanwhile, millions more are displaced by persecution in various other parts of the world, even if their stories have not captured as much media attention.

The United States of America has a proud history of welcoming refugees, and local churches have long been eager partners in the process of integration. As evangelical Christians, our faith compels us to respond with compassion and hospitality, recognizing that each is made in God's image and is a neighbor whom God commands us to love. Jesus, who as a small child was himself forced to flee from the violence of a tyrannical government, taught his disciples to do unto others as we would have them do to us; in the midst of this crisis, we hope that the American people will welcome others just as we would want to be welcomed if we were in the same desperate situation.

In recent years, the U.S. government has admitted approximately 60,000 to 70,000 refugees on an annual basis, down from a high of more than 200,000 refugees admitted and integrated into our communities in 1980. At this unique time in history, we believe that our nation could receive significantly more refugees than we have done in recent years. Resettlement to the United States is certainly not the sole nor the primary solution to this crisis, but as neighboring countries in the Middle East have taken in millions of these refugees and European allies such as Germany have pledged to receive as many as 800,000 of those seeking asylum, we are calling upon our government to do more as well, significantly increasing the total number of refugees admitted in the coming fiscal year.

As you do so, please know that there are many evangelical Christians within local churches and college campuses who are eager to volunteer their time and resources to assist in the resettlement and successful integration of these refugees. We are also committed to praying for you, for our leaders in Congress, and for the many other governmental authorities faced with immensely important decisions as you face this complex global challenge, while also praying for peaceful ends to the brutal conflicts that have forced so many to flee.

Sincerely,

The Evangelical Immigration Table

CC: Senators Vitter, Perdue, Grassley, Cornyn, Lee, Cruz, Tillis, Leahy, Feinstein, Durbin, Klobuchar, Franken, and Blumenthal

The Evangelical Immigration Table
www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com



Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

P.O. Box 29106 • Washington, DC 20017 • 202-527-7575 • 1-888-364-3388 (toll free) • 202-527-7576 (fax)

FAN Statement on October 1, 2015 Refugee Resettlement Hearing

September 30, 2015

Franciscan Action Network, with 50 institutional members and approximately 12,000 Franciscans across the United States, religious and lay men and women, primarily but not totally Catholic, urges an increase in resettlement of refugees in fiscal year 2016, especially for Syrian refugees fleeing from violent conflict. With over 60 million displaced people around the world, the United States resettled fewer than 70,000 refugees this past fiscal year. Secretary of State John Kerry announced plans for our country to resettle 85,000 refugees in fiscal year 2016 and 100,000 in fiscal year 2017. This increase is very modest compared with the number of 650,000 displaced Europeans during World War II, and, following the fall of Saigon, annual resettlement numbers ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 during the 1980's.

Resettlement security measures are integral to the United States program and the government continually fine-tunes the program to maximize domestic security. All refugees undergo rigorous security screenings. Through the Matching Grant program, 80 % of refugees find employment and become self-sufficient within six months, an impressive rate of integration which also involves learning a new language. Many refugees are highly skilled and educated. Resettlement saves lives and also helps to encourage other countries to provide for refugees within their borders.

As a faith based organization, FAN heeds the call of the Scriptures and our church leaders to welcome the stranger, especially families who are fleeing violence in their home countries. We have special concern for Syrian refugees, yet the United States has resettled only 1,700 refugees from Syria. We call on our government to admit 100,000 Syrian refugees over and above annual resettlement numbers. And we urge members of Congress to heed the message of Pope Francis when he visited our country, to put a face on the numbers of refugees.



Friends Committee on National Legislation's Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, pertaining to its hearing

Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program

Thursday, October 1, 2015

Quakers are challenged to answer that of God in all people and therefore called to act with openness to all refugees, regardless of their country of origin or religion. The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) calls on Congress to treat refugees with the same dignity and respect.

Since 1943, FCNL has lobbied Congress to prevent war, protect vulnerable populations, and support effective, principled policies to help build a more peaceful world. Perhaps the most vulnerable population today is those who are displaced worldwide – approximately 60 million people and the highest numbers since World War II. Syrian refugees seeking resettlement worldwide total approximately 4 million, though less than 1,700 have been resettled in the United States since the beginning of the conflict five years ago. The United States can do better, and open its doors to far greater numbers of refugees - and Syrians in particular - as this crisis continues to unfold.

We ask members of Congress to speak up and speak out against derogatory, inflammatory, and fear-mongering rhetoric about refugees; it has no place in response to any humanitarian crisis. Legislation based on hateful and erroneous rhetoric is simply inappropriate. FCNL unequivocally opposes any legislation or proposal that prioritizes Christian refugees at the expense of Muslim refugees and individuals from other faiths resettling in the United States. It is our responsibility as American citizens to welcome those most in need, offer refuge, and lift up our shared humanity.

Refugees are an asset to this country. Refugee communities are among the strongest advocates for the American Dream and embody American values of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all. People around the United States are ready and willing to welcome refugees into their homes, communities, and hearts. Congress can provide needed funding and reform to the resettlement program and give higher priority to refugees' well-being and swift integration into host communities.

From Syria to Afghanistan to Somalia, global refugee crises stem from deadly conflicts which will continue absent inclusive, political solutions. We call on the United States to welcome refugees at home and reinvigorate diplomatic efforts abroad to prevent ever-worsening refugee crises in these war-torn regions.

Higher walls do not make communities safe or thriving; building stronger bridges does. We are called as people of faith to work in community with and answer that of God in each person – we ask that Congress do the same and welcome refugees with open hearts and minds.



Written Statement of Heartland Alliance Before the
United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on
Immigration and the National Interest

Thursday, October 1, 2015
Hearing On

Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee
Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security
Implications

Dear Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Heartland Alliance thanks you for your thoughtful consideration of the role that the United States plays as a humanitarian leader and your consideration of the needs and contributions of refugees to our communities.

Heartland Alliance for Human Rights & Human Needs – the leading anti-poverty organization in the Midwest – believes that all of us deserve the opportunity to improve our lives. Each year, we help ensure this opportunity for thousands of people around the world who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety. From our international work with the most at-risk refugees in places like Lebanon, to our work in the Chicago region with refugees, trafficking survivors, and individuals and families impacted by poverty and violence, Heartland Alliance sees first-hand how finding safety, justice, and opportunity transforms lives and enriches communities.

The United States Must Show Leadership in the Midst of the Current Global Refugee Crisis.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2014 saw a record number of people forcibly displaced.¹ “By end-2014, 59.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. This is 8.3 million persons more than the year before (51.2 million) and the highest annual increase in a single year.”² This distressing trend continues in 2015.

The recent attention to refugees fleeing Syria gives us a glimpse of the unprecedented scale of our global crisis. Amnesty International reports that about 4 million Syrians are seeking refuge in

¹ WORLD AT WAR, UNHCR GLOBAL TRENDS FORCED DISPLACEMENT 2014, 2-3 (United Nations High Commission for Refugees ed., June 18, 2015), available at http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html#_ga=1.66905388.320825246.1443107885.

² *Id.* at 2.

other countries.³ In fact, Lebanon alone hosts more than 1 million refugees – over 25% of its population.⁴ While US refugee resettlement efforts have slowed in recent years, our history as a humanitarian leader and a nation of immigrants demands that we again become an international leader in providing asylum for those displaced due to war, violence, and persecution. In 1980, the United States welcomed over 200,000 refugees.⁵ It is time we do it again.

We urge the United States to welcome 200,000 refugees in FY 2016, including 100,000 Syrian refugees.

Refugees Enrich Our Communities

The United States has long benefited from the contributions of refugees. Physicist Albert Einstein, Oscar-winning director Milos Forman, Presidential Medal of Freedom winning author Isabel Allende, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and super-computing pioneer Philip Emeagwali, all refugees or asylees, have helped move the United States and the world forward. A robust refugee resettlement program is not only central to advancing our American values of compassion and opportunity, but it brings innovation, new talent, and commitment to our communities to help them grow and thrive.

For over 125 years, Heartland Alliance has helped immigrants establish new lives in the Chicago area and has witnessed a century of amazing contributions. With each new year, Heartland Alliance sees how the refugees we help resettle overcome the most harrowing of experiences to enhance our community. Here are some of their stories:

Bhim

Bhim resettled in Chicago at the end of 2008 after spending decades in a Nepalese refugee camp. Bhim, his parents, and his siblings fled to neighboring Nepal after Bhutanese officials tortured his parents and threatened to burn down his home, with the family still in it, if they did not leave. Bhim's family are members of an ethnic and religious minority persecuted by the Bhutanese government. Fleeing for their lives to Nepal, the family found themselves living in a refugee camp for over two decades. Life in the camp makes education and employment elusive. While an important temporary step in ensuring safety, refugee camps are not a long-term solution: individuals in refugee camps are not integrated into a community – they are often not allowed to work, find their own housing, participate in community activities, or seek higher education. Bhim, however, sought out whatever opportunities he could to receive education, learn English, and find work. When he was finally able to resettle in Chicago, Heartland Alliance worked with Bhim to find him housing and work. While he originally was only able to find part-time retail

³ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, FACTS AND FIGURES: SYRIA REFUGEE CRISIS & INTERNATIONAL RESETTLEMENT at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/12/facts-figures-syria-refugee-crisis-international-resettlement/>

⁴ *Id.*; see *supra* WORLD AT WAR, UNHCR GLOBAL TRENDS FORCED DISPLACEMENT 2014 at 2-3.

⁵ REFUGEE COUNCIL USA, HISTORY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM at <http://www.rcusa.org/history>.

employment, through hard work he has been able to advance. He is now a supervisor in the hospitality industry. Bhim's family has been able to join him in Chicago. While the realities of their persecution remain ever-present, and Bhim's parents continue to struggle with the psychological and physical ramifications of torture, Bhim, his siblings, and his parents have been able to build a life in Chicago. Bhim himself has gotten married and is now proudly a father. He volunteers in his community and has purchased a home. After a decades-long journey to find a safety and opportunity, Bhim and his family are now happily contributing members of the Chicago community.

Taw

Taw was 14 when she and her family resettled in the Chicago area in 2008; among the first Karen Burmese families resettled in the area. After decades of internal conflict in Burma, the State Department continues to report that Burmese officials torture, kill, and otherwise abuse civilians and members of ethnic groups, including those that are Karen.⁶ Taw's family spent several years in a Thai refugee camp. Refugees in Thailand, however, are not allowed to leave the refugee camps, go to Thai schools, or work. In order to build a life, Taw's family sought safety and opportunity in Chicago. Since her arrival, Taw participated in Youth Leadership programming at Heartland Alliance, worked throughout high school, and graduated with honors. Now a college graduate, Taw works with a non-profit to give back to her community and plans to attend graduate school in the future. After struggling for years to find a place that she could call home, Taw now works each and every day to improve the community she now calls home.

Ahmed

Ahmed was forced to cut off his college education in 2006 when he fled Baghdad, Iraq with his parents, a retired physician and retired pharmaceutical researcher, and his siblings. In the fall of 2008, Ahmed arrived in Chicago to make it his home. Upon arrival, Ahmed immediately worked with Heartland Alliance to find work and understand his new country. Initially, Ahmed worked in packaging, but moved to the banking industry as he built his skills. He is working towards an Associate's Degree in Business and in 2013 was promoted from being a bank teller to a personal banker. Ahmed is committed to supporting his family and has purchased a home for his parents in Lincolnwood, Illinois. At just 28, Ahmed has managed to change the trajectory of his life and help his family settle into a new community.

We have just begun to see Syrian refugees arriving in the Chicago area, and like our neighbors above, these Syrian families have been working to become economically self-sufficient and build lives in their new community. Their contributions to our country have just begun.

⁶UNITED STATES DEP'T OF STATE, COUNTRY REPORTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES FOR 2014: *Burma* at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236428#wrapper>

Refugee Resettlement is a Smart Investment

Investing in refugee resettlement is also economically smart. A 2012 study of the contributions of refugees in Cleveland underscores the value that refugees, like the ones above, bring to their welcoming communities, determining that “[i]n advanced economies, once refugees have adjusted to their new life after resettlement, they can provide substantial contributions to the workforce and economic development in the long run at the regional level.”⁷ Indeed, the economists studying the Cleveland area found that the total economic impact of resettled refugees was \$48 million, supporting 650 jobs.⁸

The refugee resettlement program is a lean, but effective program. We have 180 days and slightly more than \$1000 in assistance to help a resettling refugee find stability and self-sufficiency. And while the stories above demonstrate that refugees tenaciously strive to build strong lives in their new communities, overly limited resources means that refugees who are recovering from trauma, isolation, and health challenges who can become self-sufficient may not receive all the services and resources that they need to reach that sufficiency quickly. As the United States moves towards a greater leadership role in the global refugee crisis, we must invest the resources necessary to ensure this program remains successful. As we see in Cleveland, the return on that investment is immense.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that all individual have the right to seek asylum outside their native country when they have experienced persecution.⁹ If the United States is committed to advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms, we must respond to this unprecedented crisis and show our long-standing commitment to compassion to the rest of the world. We urge the United States to increase the number of refugees it welcomes in FY2016 and make strong investments at home and abroad to support refugees as they struggle to rebuild their lives. Heartland Alliance is committed to helping the United States meet these humanitarian goals.

⁷ CHMURA ECONOMICS & ANALYTICS, ECONOMIC IMPACT OF REFUGEES IN THE CLEVELAND AREA 3 (2012).

⁸ *Id.* at 4 (comparing the positive economic impact of refugee resettlement of \$48 million with the significantly smaller 2012 spending in the Cleveland area on newly resettled refugees of approximately \$4.8 million).

⁹ UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, Art. XIV.



**Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.**

Statement submitted to the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate

Hearing: "Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications"

October 1, 2015

HIAS has welcomed refugees to the United States as new Americans for more than 130 years. As a Jewish-American organization, HIAS is acutely concerned both with the imperative to rescue refugees and to protect the security of our country. As Jews, we support policies that fulfill the Torah's mandate to 'welcome the stranger,' as we know that effective resettlement policies make the difference between life and death, between oppression and the opportunity for success.

Not since World War II has the world seen a humanitarian crisis on the scale that we face today. Nearly sixty million people are displaced from their homes due to violence and persecution. When faced with human suffering on this scale, we must decide how we will respond as a nation. In 1945, President Truman remarked that the United States "may do something to relieve human misery, and set an example to the other countries of the world which are able to receive some of these war sufferers. I feel that it is essential that we do this ourselves to show our good faith in requesting other nations to open their doors for this purpose."¹ These words still hold true today.

For seventy years the U.S. has been an example to the rest of the world and has been a leader in providing both humanitarian assistance and for resettling the most vulnerable refugees from around the world. This leadership has not come without challenges; however we have been able to overcome those challenges and provide refuge. As a result of our efforts we have thrived as a nation.

The challenges we face today are not small. The three "durable solutions" in refugee protection are: repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. As the conflicts that cause displacement continue to escalate and with no end in sight, returning home is not a safe option for most people. The escalating conflicts cause regional instability and a strain on host countries, many of which are developing countries, and this makes local integration unlikely. Waiting out the conflict is also not an option for many. Refugees in host countries face inadequate housing and food, limited access to medical and

¹ President Harry S. Truman, Statement and Directive by the President on Immigration to the United States of Certain Displaced Persons and Refugees in Europe (Dec. 22, 1945).

psychological care, lack of education opportunities, and limited ability to support themselves. Resettlement is the only solution for the most vulnerable refugees.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has resettled three million people since it was implemented in the early 1980s. We have the infrastructure to resettle refugees from anywhere in the world. To increase our current efforts would require a financial investment, however there are ways to increase the efficiency of the program such as eliminating redundancies in the application process.

Every nation has an obligation to keep its citizens safe. Of course the United States must ensure that anyone resettled in our country does not intend to do harm. Since 9/11, security screenings for refugees have become much more rigorous. In fact, refugees are the most thoroughly vetted of all types of immigrants entering the country. The Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security share in the responsibility of screening refugee applicants. An applicant's biographic information and biometric information are vetted against multiple law enforcement and intelligence databases including the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS), which includes the government's terrorist watchlist information, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS), and DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). This is in addition to the in-person interview conducted by DHS staff to ascertain the validity of the claim for refugee status. The system is in place and it is effective at screening out those that wish to do harm. While we strive to perfect this process, security concerns must not hold us back from enacting policies that save lives and are in our national interest.

Refugees resettled in the United States have an opportunity to build a new life. Most of them seize that opportunity to the benefit of themselves but also to the benefit of the communities that welcome them. Refugees start businesses, pay taxes, and purchase goods and services. They can help to revitalize cities and create new jobs. Refugees can also bring skills that are rare for Americans, which will also benefit society at large. While there is an investment to be made in resettling refugees, there is also a tremendous gain.

In the aftermath of World War II, the price for keeping doors closed to refugees was made starkly clear. We can and we must do more to alleviate the global refugee crisis. This will not come without a dedication of resources, but those resources will be used to help those faced with unspeakable tragedy to reach safety and rebuild their lives. The U.S. must continue to set the example for the rest of the world and use our resources and expertise to help the most vulnerable. President Truman observed that during a "period of unspeakable human distress is not the time for us to close or narrow our gates."² We must take this to heart and use it to guide us in this time of crisis.

² President Harry S. Truman, Statement and Directive by the President on Immigration to the United States of Certain Displaced Persons and Refugees in Europe (Dec. 22, 1945).



HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST
Written Statement for
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications
October 1, 2015

We are pleased to submit this statement on behalf of Human Rights First. Human Rights First works in the United States and abroad to promote a secure and humane world by advancing justice, human dignity, and respect for the rule of law. Human Rights First is an independent advocacy organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization with offices in New York, Washington D.C., and Houston, Texas.

For over 30 years, we've built bipartisan coalitions and teamed up with frontline activists and lawyers to tackle issues that demand American leadership, including the protection of the rights of refugees who flee persecution. Protecting the persecuted is a core American value. Reflecting this country's deep-seated commitment to liberty and human dignity, as well as its pledge under the 1951 Refugee Convention's Protocol, the United States has long led efforts to protect those who flee from political, religious, and other persecution.

The world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Globally, about 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Over 4 million Syrians have fled their country, and many have been stranded for years in neighboring countries where they can't work, cannot support their families, have little access to education, and face shortages in food and other assistance due to massive underfunding of UN humanitarian aid appeals. Syria's neighbors, faced with overwhelming refugee numbers and inadequate international support, have made it more difficult for refugees to enter to seek protection or extend their stays. Meanwhile, the fighting and violence within Syria has intensified, leaving refugees with little hope that they will be able to safely return.

Many are turning to dangerous routes to reach places of safety where they can rebuild their lives. Thousands have embarked on risky journeys in an attempt to reach Europe.

This is a defining moment for the world, and the United States. Faced with the largest refugee crisis since World War II, how will the United States respond? Will it exercise leadership by truly sharing in the responsibility of hosting more of Syria's refugees or will it provide refuge to only a token or minimal number?

How the United States addresses this refugee crisis will be a critical test for U.S. leadership. The United States has played a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance, giving over \$4 billion to relief efforts both within Syria and in neighboring countries. This is consistent both with U.S. leadership on humanitarian relief and its strategic interest in preventing further destabilization of the region. But the U.S. government can and should do more, including by using its unique position as a global leader to champion the protection of refugees trying to flee from Syria and to launch a meaningful resettlement initiative. The United States has not launched a significant resettlement initiative that would demonstrate to Syria's neighbors a real commitment to share in hosting a meaningful number of Syria's refugees and would encourage other resettlement states to follow suit. A meaningful resettlement initiative, in addition to providing a future to the individual refugees and families it would directly assist, should be seen as part of a broader effort to increase the protection space available to Syrian refugees in the region and globally.

The United States has long been a leader in protecting refugees and has typically resettled about half of the refugees identified as in need of resettlement each year. The United States had only resettled about 1,300 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2015 through August 31, and has only committed so far to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon are hosting about 4 million Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, Germany has announced it can host 800,000. This level of U.S. response falls far short of global leadership, and our resettlement process is much too slow, often taking two years or longer.

The United States must lead, and lead by example. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it is strategically smart. In addition to supporting Europe, a stronger refugee response will promote the stability of states bordering Syria including key U.S. allies in the region, such as Jordan.

In light of this global emergency situation, we urge the United States to lead a comprehensive global initiative in partnership with European and other states to improve access to protection for refugees. We urge the United States government, led by the President and the Secretary of State to:

1. **Increase resettlement and other routes to protection.** The United States should lead a global initiative that includes many countries to resettle or provide other admission to 1 to 1.5 million Syrian refugees. The U.S. should press other countries to sharply increase resettlement or other admission routes, and call on the European Union to create safe and legal ways for refugees to reach Europe. The United States should lead by example by increasing its own resettlement commitment to 100,000 Syrian refugees for fiscal year 2016 and increase the overall refugee ceiling (for refugees from all countries) to 200,000. The United States should also implement more expeditious routes to protection for Syrian refugees with family in the United States and other at-risk refugees, utilizing various priority processing mechanisms and other tools. In the next month, the administration should appoint a high-level coordinator in the White House to oversee the refugee response and improve inter-agency collaboration to improve the pace of resettlement, as well as high-level refugee coordinators at the Departments of State and Homeland Security, who can focus – full time – on addressing resettlement processing delays and logjams.
2. **Ensure sufficient vetting resources.** The resettlement process includes the execution of multiple security checks. In fact, refugees are much more thoroughly vetted than other categories of individuals who come to the United States. The President should direct the FBI and other security vetting agencies to increase their focus on, and devote additional and sufficient staff time and resources to the conduct and completion of such checks, including all follow up reviews. Improving the timeliness and efficiency of the security clearance process would enhance security and would also eliminate some delays and save government resources which are now wasted when parts of the process have to be redone due to these delays.

3. **Finally reform the resettlement process.** Over the next six months, the administration should review and reform the delay-plagued resettlement process to be more timely and effective without compromising security. This is not the first time the system has failed to respond adequately. Many Iraqis who worked with the U.S. military or U.S. entities were left stranded for years waiting to be brought to safety in the United States. Some suffered attacks while waiting for our slow resettlement process to move forward.
4. **Meet humanitarian assistance goal.** The United States should lead a global push to secure 100% funding of the UN's humanitarian appeal for the Syria crisis, set a strong example by further stepping up its contribution to cover a higher percentage of the appeal, significantly increase development funding for refugee-hosting countries, press wealthy states to increase contributions and develop longer term strategies for meeting the front-line needs of refugees and hosting communities.
5. **Champion protection for refugees.** The United States should encourage states in the region neighboring Syria – and in Europe and beyond – to respect the human rights of refugees and migrants, including to allow refugees to work to support their families, to educate children, to facilitate access to higher education, and to respect obligations to protect people from arbitrary detention and return to persecution.
6. **Redouble efforts to find effective multilateral solutions to the political and security crisis** in Syria and to address the human rights abuses causing so many people to flee in search of protection.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, leading Jewish groups, major faith-based groups, and even the [Pope](#) have called on the United States to respond to this refugee crisis. Human Rights First and other leading organizations focused on refugee protection and refugee resettlement have called on the administration to resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. [Various former government officials](#) including national security experts who served in both democratic and republican administrations have called on the United States to lead by example to commit to resettling 100,000 refugees.

The United States has always led in times of international crisis. This country should continue to be a beacon on human rights. Human Rights First believes that America is strongest when our policies and values match our actions.

Written Testimony of Rabbi Jack Moline, Executive Director of Interfaith Alliance

Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee for the Hearing Record on "Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications"

October 1, 2015

On behalf of Interfaith Alliance, whose membership represents individuals from seventy-five faith traditions committed to defending religious freedom, I would like to thank Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, and the members of the Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to submit a statement about the plight of Syrian refugees. As an organization dedicated to the religious freedom here at home in the U.S., it is rare that we comment international crises, but we are moved to do so by the immediacy of this moment and the implications for religious communities that will certainly reverberate here at home.

When we look inside our religious traditions, many of us find the inspiration – if not the moral mandate – to address this humanitarian crisis. Whether from the biblical commandment to not stand idly by the blood of a neighbor, the spiritual understanding of our own oneness with all those who suffer, or a theological commitment to the sanctity of every human life – our faith cannot abide suffering on the magnitude we see among Syrian refugees today. No one could put it more eloquently or passionately than Pope Francis when he addressed a joint session of Congress last week:

"We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation... To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome."

As Pope Francis described, theological and spiritual imperatives motivate many of us to address the current refugee crisis, it is also the history of our religious communities that drives our moral urgency. From the time the pilgrims landed in Plymouth to our work to provide safe harbor for Evangelical Christians persecuted in China, the United States has been built on a commitment to provide refuge for religious communities in need. Throughout our history they U.S. has opened its doors to Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Evangelical Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs and countless others who faced religious persecution at home. There is, in fact, no better antidote to religious tyranny, extremism and the targeting of religious minorities, than a healthy and welcoming approach to refugees.

My own community's memory of the refugee experience is still fresh and, for many, brutally painful. We remember our grandparents, our siblings, and loved ones who were denied entry to the United States despite the atrocities they faced in the Holocaust. In that time, the suffering of too many was ignored and too many people died.

World War II drove our nation and the world to rethink the way we address refugees. The legacy of that suffering was a commitment to never close our doors to so many in need again. Since then we have made room on our shores for people escaping political repression in Latin America, fleeing the aftermath of the war in Vietnam, searching for freedom from the Soviet Union's restrictions on religious practice, and many, many more. But that is a legacy we are failing today.

While religion may inspire us to act in the face of this crisis, while religion may be at the center of our historical experience as refugees, religion and religious prejudice should never stop us from helping those most in need. Too many people – and far too many politicians - have raised the specter terrorism, fed on fears of Islamic fundamentalism, as an excuse for inaction in helping refugees from Syria. The anti-Muslim bigotry that has fueled hate crimes across the nation, demonstrations at mosques and community centers, and unjust surveillance of religious communities, now threatens to stay our hands from reaching out to those crying for help.

Faith may be the basis of our call to action, but it must not be the barrier. We may be moved by the faith of those suffering, but we cannot let it stand in the way of our aid. Neither the Constitution nor our moral conscience can allow a person's religion to condemn a person to be ignored and invisible to our efforts to help.

As the situation in Syria deteriorates, and the plight of refugees endures, the U.S. government is compelled to act. As your committee examines how best to address this situation, I hope you draw inspiration from your faith tradition, I hope you remember the plight of religious refugees throughout our nation's history and, most importantly, I hope you can see past the bigotry and prejudice that too often clouds our conversations about Syria and the Muslim community.

**The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights**

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International Union, UAW
**Policy and Enforcement
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Michael Lieberman
Anti-Defamation League
President & CEO
Wade J. Henderson
Executive Vice President & COO
Karen McGill Lawson

September 25, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Syrian Refugee Crisis

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to take bold, exemplary action to address an ongoing refugee crisis that has evolved into one of the largest we have seen in recent history. The heartbreaking image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi lying on a Turkish beach has quickly come to symbolize the countless numbers of Syrians who are living in the midst of a brutal civil war that has no clear end in sight. As the world continues to respond to that war, we have a moral imperative and a tradition to uphold with respect to its civilian victims, and we have an example we urgently need to set before the rest of the world.

We were encouraged by the recent news that you will increase the overall number of refugee admissions in the coming years. The goals you have set would represent a good step forward, particularly with respect to the troubling low number – approximately 1,600 – of Syrian refugees who have been admitted to the United States since 2011.

We strongly urge you to go far beyond the goals you recently announced. Numerous refugee advocacy organizations, both here and abroad, have urgently called for a significantly higher number of admissions to address the ongoing crisis and to pressure other countries to do the same (for example, Refugee Council USA, to which some of our member organizations belong, has called for the United States to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees in 2016). Several Middle Eastern and European countries, much smaller than ours, have recently captured the moral high ground. Syria's neighbors have demonstrated their willingness to bear more than their share of the burden of caring for Syrian refugees; for example, Lebanon has taken in one million refugees, Turkey has taken in two million, and Jordan has taken in half a million. Germany, providing important leadership to the European Union, has pledged to take in 800,000 refugees. The United States has historically taken in the

September 25, 2015
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largest share of refugees eligible for resettlement. We need to take further steps in this instance, and lead by example and encourage additional countries to step in as well.

At the same time, we stand with you in the face of unconscionable political attacks upon these refugees and their religious and ethnic background, which are being thrown about as the next election cycle draws nearer and as some candidates say whatever they feel must be said to appeal to their base voters. It is incredibly easy for people to attack the legitimacy of refugees, when they themselves have the good fortune of living in a country they will never have to flee. But our national policies must be better than the rhetoric we hear from some corners.

The truth is that refugees have long proven to be a tremendous asset to our economy and our national well-being. Despite the trauma they have faced in their home countries, refugees who arrive in our country have a strong reputation of valuing education, hard work, and building our economy. Moreover, refugees go through more security vetting than immigrants or visitors who come through any other channel. In short, our kindness to refugees has long been proven to generate returns that go beyond the ability to look at our collective selves in the mirror.

We realize there are significant logistical challenges to the increased admission of refugees, including not only the immediate vetting and relocation, but also long-term integration and the transition to citizenship. We remain fully committed to working with you on long-term comprehensive immigration reform, including the resources necessary to help transform refugees into productive, proud Americans.

Again, we must remain mindful of our moral imperative to help respond to this crisis, and to set a benchmark for the rest of the world moving forward. We appreciate the efforts you have undertaken so far, and we look forward to seeing them continue.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO
The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

Judith Lichtman
Chairperson
The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

Samer Khalaf
President
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination
Committee

Jonathan Greenblatt
National Director
Anti-Defamation League

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Mee Moua
President and Executive Director
Asian American Advancing Justice



Elisa Massimino
President & CEO
Human Rights First



Hilary O. Shelton
Director
NAACP Washington Bureau & Senior Vice
President for Advocacy and Policy



Janet Murgía
President & CEO
National Council of La Raza



Debra L. Ness
President
National Partnership for Women and
Families

Statement for the Record on
“Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee
Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications”

Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest

October 1, 2015

by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the United States Refugee Admissions Program. As the national organization founded by Lutherans to serve uprooted people, LIRS is committed to helping those who have been forced to flee their homes find protection. Following God’s call in scripture to uphold justice for the sojourner, LIRS serves as a leader in calling for the protection of vulnerable migrants and refugees, including children and families from Syria.

For over 75 years, LIRS has worked to welcome over 500,000 refugees to the United States on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In Fiscal Year 2015, LIRS and its refugee resettlement network partners welcomed over 10,500 refugees to their new communities and empowered them to build new lives.

Resettlement in a third country is considered a durable solution and a last resort for only a small fraction of the world’s most vulnerable refugees. LIRS is proud to be one of nine organizations that partners with the federal government, particularly the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to be a part of this solution.

LIRS is dismayed that despite the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registering over 4 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are children, only a precious few Syrian refugees have been resettled in the United States. LIRS has urged the U.S. government to do far more by resettling 200,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016, including 100,000 Syrians. In response to past global crises, the U.S. has led the effort to resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees — a tiny fraction of those who are displaced — and America has always been better and stronger as a result.

With the support of local churches and communities, our nation has the capacity to take a bold stance in welcoming far more of these vulnerable refugees into the United States.

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) that is located within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agency continually achieves its dual mission to offer resettlement opportunities to eligible refugees while safeguarding the integrity of the program and the United States' national security. To protect U.S. national security, DHS provides advanced training to its refugee adjudicators on security protocols, fraud detection and fraud prevention. In addition, each refugee considered for resettlement in the United States goes through a multi-layered screening process before coming to the United States. These processes include multiple biographic and biometric checks by U.S. security vetting agencies which are routinely updated, in-person interviews with trained adjudication's officers and 'pre- departure' checks. No case is finally approved until results from all security checks have been received and analyzed.

To add unnecessary security screening mechanisms to this already robust process would needlessly harm individuals who need protection by delaying their resettlement. "Sadly, the Syrian refugee population includes severely vulnerable individuals: women and girls at risk, survivors of torture and violence, and people with serious medical needs or disabilities," said Linda Hartke, LIRS President and CEO. "LIRS and our national network stand ready to do what it takes to welcome into U.S. communities the most vulnerable Syrian refugees who cannot return home or integrate in the countries currently hosting them."

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program offers refugees safe haven and a chance at a new life, while also bringing tangible benefits to the communities that welcome them. Having endured incredible hardship and unimaginable horrors in their home countries, refugees often spend years exiled in host countries once they flee, awaiting the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Once they are resettled in a third country, refugees routinely become engaged and productive community members, contributing economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities. The support of welcoming communities, congregations, volunteers, employers, schools, foster families and others makes resettlement a successful public-private partnership. The federal government, particularly PRM and ORR, and state governments play a vital role.

In the case of Syrian refugees, the conflict continues to worsen and host countries in the region are increasingly strained and unable to offer benefits or stability. Desperate refugees are risking their lives and the lives of their entire families making dangerous journeys over land and sea to reach safety. Hundreds of thousands have arrived in Europe with the hope of a permanent solution. While most citizens in affected countries in the European Union have reacted with welcome, some governments are choosing to close and militarize their borders to keep refugees out. It is against this backdrop that LIRS and our partners will continue to call on the Administration to resettle more Syrian refugees.

Increased Funding Needs and Necessary Resettlement Reforms

Resources available to individual refugee families and adults through ORR have remained stagnant for many years. To ensure that Syrian refugees resettled in the United States receive the help they need to locate housing, receive medical attention and employment assistance, among other services, and to promote self-sufficiency and long-term integration this funding must be increased. In addition, Congress must authorize and appropriate funds to meet the needs of the additional 15,000 refugees that the President has authorized for admission in FY2016.

While private support plays an important role in the reception and integration of refugees, federal resources are critical to ensure refugees receive essential services. Refugee populations arriving to the United States have changed significantly since the formal establishment of the resettlement program in the Refugee Act of 1980. Today's refugees are much more diverse and vulnerable than it was more than three decades ago. However, services lack flexibility to be responsive to the diverse strengths and needs of refugees arriving today. Furthermore, ORR's mandate has expanded over the years from serving resettled refugees to include asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, survivors of human trafficking and torture and unaccompanied children. Because funding has not kept up with these changes in ORR's mandate and diversifying client needs, ORR has strained to provide sufficient support and services to all of the populations under its care.

Reforms to Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds

Under immigration law, an individual cannot be admitted to the United States if they have provided material support, including insignificant material support, to an undesignated terrorist organization; a member of such an organization; or to an individual the individual knows, or reasonably should know, has committed or plans to commit a terrorist activity. In 2001, Congress enacted legislation that significantly broadened the definition of "terrorist activity."

As a result, refugees, including many vulnerable Syrian refugees who pose no threat to national security, face denial of protection and resettlement in the United States due to unintended consequences of the overly-broad application of the "material support to terrorist organizations" bar (and related bars) to admission. Indeed, current law threatens to exclude any Syrians who fought with any armed opposition group in Syria (regardless of whether or not the individual applicant was involved in any violations of international humanitarian law or other crimes), anyone who provided "material support" to any opposition force or opposition fighter, anyone who solicited funds or members for such a force, and even anyone whose spouse or parent is found to have done these things.

These bars are duplicative and carry severe consequences. As mentioned previously, refugees are required to pass intense security screenings and background checks as part of the admission process.

People who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, or who persecute others are inadmissible to the United States under other provisions of our immigration laws. However, overly broad “terrorism” bars prevent the ability of the United States to provide welcome to bona fide refugees seeking safety.

LIRS Recommendations

LIRS’s expertise, experience, and compassion -- drawn from decades of welcoming vulnerable newcomers -- inspires our advocacy. To address current resettlement needs facing refugees, including millions of Syrian refugees, and improve welcome for refugees in the United States, LIRS makes the following recommendations to Congress:

- **Enact pending legislation to strengthen refugee protections and resettlement**, including the bi-partisan Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015 (H.R. 1568).
- **Urge the President to authorize the admission of 100,000 Syrian refugees** in Fiscal Year 2016 through an Emergency Presidential Determination on Additional Refugee Admissions pursuant to Section 207(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.
- **Support alternative mechanisms to resettle more Syrian refugees**, including:
 - Identifying specific groups of refugees in the region as being of particular humanitarian concern to the United States and designating them for group processing.
 - Expanding family reunification opportunities through the USRAP (through the P3 family reunification priority) to allow Syrians in legal status in the United States, even if they did not arrive as refugees, to file affidavits of relationship (AORs).
 - Allowing specific NGOs in the region to make direct resettlement referrals to the United States. The U.S. government should provide increased capacity building and training for these NGO partners so they can identify and refer the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement.
 - Utilizing iris scans and additional biometric data that UNHCR has collected for 65-67% of registered Syrian refugees. The use of this data could help reduce redundancies in the USRAP screening process.
- **Amend problematic anti-terrorism provisions** that define “material support” too broadly.
- **Ensure robust funding** of the Department of State’s, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement to better protect and assist refugees overseas and those resettled to the United States, including:

- **Funding appropriate for successful support and resettlement of the authorized 85,000 refugee admissions** in FY 2016.
- **Funding for DHS** to make more **frequent visits to the region** to conduct interviews with refugees slated for potential resettlement. When security concerns make in-person interviews impossible, DHS should consider using video conferencing for interviews.
- **Funding to decrease wait times:** Security checks are a vital part of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and have proven successful in maintaining the program's integrity. Although these safeguards have been enhanced and updated, Congress should authorize sufficient funds such that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), other U.S. security agencies, and the White House have sufficient resources and staff to eliminate delays and redundancies to reduce the waiting time for refugees at significant risk.
- **Increased per capita funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)** to allow these agencies to support programming that assists communities and organizations that resettle Syrian refugees to foster a welcoming climate for them, offer services that are tailored for Syrian refugees, and include a long-term focus on their successful integration.

If you have any questions about this statement, please contact Brittney Nystrom, LIRS Director for Advocacy at bnystrom@lirs.org or 202.626.7943.



**Statement of
Mary Meg McCarthy, Executive Director
Heartland Alliance's National Immigrant Justice Center**

**Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
Hearing on "Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications"**

October 1, 2015

Heartland Alliance's National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) joins the chorus of voices calling for moral leadership from the United States in the face of today's global refugee crisis. The United States has a proud history as a generous and welcoming nation to people seeking safe haven. Now is the time for the U.S. government to reaffirm America's commitment to provide safety to people who flee persecution, both those who seek protection abroad and those who reach our own borders.

This statement focuses on the United States' obligations under international human rights and refugee law. NIJC is a non-governmental organization based in Chicago and dedicated to safeguarding the rights of immigrants in the United States. Since its founding 30 years ago, NIJC has advocated for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through direct legal representation, policy reform, impact litigation, and public education. NIJC and its *pro bono* attorneys provide legal representation to approximately 10,000 individuals annually, including low-income immigrants, refugees, victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied minors, and asylum seekers.

NIJC's vast experience with asylum seekers, from both policy and direct services perspectives, provides us unique insight regarding the many populations who flee extreme violence in their home countries and need protection. We recommend that the government:

1. Safeguard access to protections for all refugees, regardless of their country of origin or where they seek safety.
2. Improve and expand access to refugee processing in Central America.
3. Provide additional funding to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to right-size immigration court staffing to meet the demands of its docket.
4. Appoint counsel to vulnerable populations in removal proceedings.

These recommendations are critical to maintaining the United States' proud reputation as a nation that provides refuge to those fleeing harm.

- I. The U.S. government must ensure that all refugees – those abroad and those reaching the United States – have robust access to protections.**

The United States' history of extending protection to those fleeing harm is well known and respected throughout the world. Our recognition of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness has made the United States a beacon of hope for people fleeing oppression. More than 60 years ago, in the wake of a devastating war and in the middle of the greatest refugee crisis in world history, the United States played a leading role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ an instrument designed to protect all individuals, regardless of their citizenship status. The Declaration laid the foundation for all subsequent international human rights law.

The primary instruments through which States assumed legal duties toward refugees are the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention)² and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Protocol).³ Among other provisions, these instruments require States to provide protection to individuals who meet the definition of a refugee, to accord refugees certain legal rights, and to refrain from returning them to countries where their safety would be threatened. Although the United States did not sign the Refugee Convention, it did sign and ratify the Refugee Protocol. In 1980, the United States enacted the Refugee Act⁴ to ensure compliance with the Refugee Protocol. Of note, the Refugee Act established procedures for the United States to admit refugees from abroad as well as grant asylum to those who reach our shores without going through the refugee admissions process. The law recognizes that people fleeing persecution are equally in need of protection regardless of where their displacement takes them or whether they are able to access formal protection mechanisms before they flee.

NIJC has urged the U.S. government to provide a robust response to the current flow of refugees driven from Syria due to unabated and prolonged conflict. We will continue to press the administration to do everything possible to increase its refugee resettlement admissions. **As the U.S. government prepares to welcome an increasing number of Syrian refugees, it must also examine its reception and treatment of refugees from all countries who manage to reach the U.S. border.** Over the past year in particular, an influx of equally deserving asylum seekers from Central America have made harrowing journeys through Mexico in search of protection by the United States. The U.S. government has expressed support for Syrian refugees and must likewise support Central American refugees by acknowledging failed policies that have impeded their protection. Since last summer, the U.S. government has responded to the humanitarian crisis in Central America by subjecting them to expedited removal, building massive detention centers for mothers and children, and obstructing their access to legal counsel.

As a direct service provider to asylum seekers from all over the world, NIJC's staff know first-hand that refugees from Syria and Central America share many of the same experiences. Similar to numerous refugee groups that the United States has welcomed in the past, Syrian and Central American refugee families have survived unspeakable violence in their home countries as the result of the breakdown of the rule of law. Like the victims of Syria's conflict, those who flee Central America's destabilizing violence and turmoil often have been targeted for reasons that give rise to

¹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html>.

² UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>.

³ UN General Assembly, *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 31 January 1967, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 606, p. 267, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3ae4.html>.

⁴ Refugee Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-212, 94 Stat. 102.

viable refugee claims, such as gender, family membership, and status as witnesses of crimes. In both regions, many of those who are most impacted are women and children, leaving them especially vulnerable. Both Syrians and Central Americans arrive at the borders of Western countries after dangerous journeys. Whether navigating the perilous Mediterranean Sea or traversing Mexico and the Southwest desert, refugees' face perils nearly as grave as staying home, but the mere possibility of safety drives these men, women, and children to set out in hope of survival.

The parallels between these two refugee populations are undeniable. The United States has a moral responsibility to welcome all refugees with compassion and ensure that they have equal opportunities to pursue asylum protections.

II. Improve the Central American Minors (CAM) Refugee/Parole Program to accommodate more children fleeing rampant violence in Central America.

Much like the refugee crisis in Europe where many nations are assessing their response to new arrivals, the United States is not the only country experiencing a dramatic increase in asylum seekers from Central America. Together, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize reported a 712 percent increase in the number of asylum applications filed by individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras from 2008 to 2013.⁵ These figures are a reminder of our shared responsibility in the region to protect those fleeing violence and offer an opportunity for the United States to lead by example with a compassionate response.

As part of that response, the U.S. government created the CAM Program to provide an alternative path for unaccompanied immigrant children facing persecution and violence in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under the program, parents with legal status in the United States may sponsor their children for in-country refugee processing. Children must be nationals of one of the Northern Triangle countries and must reside in that country while their applications are processed. Children who are approved will be granted refugee status and allowed to join their parent(s) in the United States.

The CAM Program requires children to apply for refugee status and wait in their home countries for their applications to be processed. Currently, processing times are estimated at approximately 12 months. This wait time is not only impractical, but is extremely precarious for asylum seekers at risk of imminent harm given the extreme violence that plagues the Northern Triangle.

There is a misperception by some that recent asylum seekers from Central America are not "real refugees" and are instead simply seeking economic opportunity or family reunification. This assumption overlooks the reality on the ground: more than 90% of detained families from Central America were passing preliminary asylum screenings in 2015⁶ and the destabilizing regional violence and turmoil they describe has been well-documented in recent years.⁷ For the past two years, San

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <http://unhcrwashington.org/children>.

⁶ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Asylum Division, "Family Facilities: Credible Fear," FY 2015 2nd Quarter, <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Outreach/PED-CF-RF-family-facilities-FY2015Q2.pdf>.

⁷ See, e.g., "Guatemala 2013 Crime and Safety Report", U.S. State Department, Apr. 2013, http://www.iccnw.org/documents/Access_to_Justice_in_Mexico_-_English.pdf; "Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: Its Evolution and Role in Migration", Migration Policy Institute, Nov. 2012, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/RMSG-TransnationalCrime.pdf>; "Forced from Home: The Lost Boys and Girls

Pedro Sula in northwest Honduras has had the highest murder rate in the world, with 169 homicides for every 100,000 inhabitants – 36 times as many deaths as the U.S. national average.⁸ Violence in Guatemala and El Salvador is equally pervasive. The expansion and increased influence of the Mexican-based drug cartel Los Zetas, has increased gang violence in the region and impunity is nearly universal.⁹ The U.S. State Department reported that Guatemala has one of the highest rates of violent crime in Central America, with nearly 100 murders each week.¹⁰ In El Salvador, a 2012 truce between rival gangs has completely broken down. Homicide levels have increased since the middle of 2013 and have now reached levels similar to those in 2011.¹¹ There were 14 murders per day during the first few weeks of 2015, which is similar to homicide rates pre-dating the 2012 gang truce.¹² In addition, corruption is widespread in Central America and seeking police protection from criminal elements is not an option.¹³ Over the past three years, 48,947 people were murdered in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Countries achieved convictions in 2,295 of those homicide cases, meaning 95 percent of homicides went unsolved or unprosecuted.¹⁴

Even more concerning, children are increasingly targeted for violence. In Honduras, a boy born today has a one-in-nine chance of being murdered.¹⁵ El Salvador and Guatemala have the highest child murder rates in the world.¹⁶ These factors, combined with the lack of an effective government response, have left many children with no choice but to flee for their lives.

One of those children is Oscar (pseudonym). Oscar's friend, Alex, was only 13 when a gang in Guatemala murdered him for refusing to join them. For two years, the same gang that killed Alex also threatened to kill

of Central America”, Women’s Refugee Commission, Oct. 2012, <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/migrant-rights-and-justice/844-forced-from-home-the-lost-boys-and-girls-of-central-america/file>; “Invisible Victims: Migrant on the Move in Mexico”, Amnesty International, 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/014/2010/en/8459f0ac-03ce-4302-8bd2-3305bdac9cde/amr410142010eng.pdf>; “Persistent Insecurity: Abuses Against Central Americans in Mexico”, Jesuit Refugee Services, November 2013, https://www.jrsusa.org/Assets/Publications/File/Persistent_Insecurity.pdf; “A Profile of the Modern Salvadoran Migrant”, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, December 2013, http://www.uscrrrefugees.org/2010Website/3_Our%20Work/Child_Migrants/FINAL_ENGLISH_VERSION.pdf

⁸ FBI, Crime in the United States by Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2012. <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/tables/6tabledatadecpdf>; Romo, Rafael and Nick Thompson. “Inside San Pedro Sula, the ‘Murder Capital’ of the World.” CNN. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/27/world/americas/honduras-murder-capital/>.

⁹ Catherine Shoichet, “Mexican Forces Struggle to Rein in Armed Vigilantes Battling Drug Cartel,” CNN, Jan. 17, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/17/world/americas/mexico-michoacan-vigilante-groups>.

¹⁰ Guatemala 2013 Crime and Safety Report, OSAC, U.S. Dept. of State: Bureau of Diplomatic Security, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=13878>.

¹¹ Robert Valencia, “How El Salvador’s Gang Truce Redefined the Geography of Violence,” *InSight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas*, Apr. 9, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/how-el-salvadors-gang-truce-redefined-geography-violence>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Charles Parkinson, “Why is Latin America So Corrupt?” *InSight Crime*, Jan. 8, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/why-is-latin-america-so-corrupt>.

¹⁴ Suchit Chavez & Jessica Avalos, “The Northern Triangle: The Countries That Don’t Cry for Their Dead,” *InSight Crime – Organized Crime in the Americas*, April 24, 2014, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-northern-triangle-the-countries-that-dont-cry-for-their-dead>.

¹⁵ Frances Robles, “Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/world/americas/fleeing-gangs-children-head-to-us-border.html?_r=1.

¹⁶ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, Sept. 2014, http://files.unicef.org/publications/files/Hidden_in_plain_sight_statistical_analysis_EN_3_Sept_2014.pdf, p. 36.

Oscar if he did not join the gang. Initially, the gang tried to force Oscar to do things he did not want to do, like use drugs. As time went on, their efforts to force Oscar to join escalated, and the gang threatened to kill Oscar's family if he went to the police for help. Oscar finally fled after a friend told him that the gang had set a date and time to kill him. He came to the United States to seek refuge with his father, who has lived in the United States for nearly 10 years.

Children like Oscar cannot wait for months in the midst of danger while the United States processes their refugee claims; choosing to endure wait of many months rather than flee immediately may often be a choice between life and death.

The CAM Program requirement that parents must have legal status in the United States to sponsor their children for refugee status also makes the pool of eligible children very small. To broaden access to asylum protections and prevent children from embarking on dangerous journeys to the United States, the government should allow undocumented parents to sponsor children and should permit children with viable refugee claims with no parents in the United States to participate.

Expanding sponsor eligibility to undocumented parents is a rational move. Many of these parents would likely be eligible for relief under President Obama's Immigration Executive Action or the bipartisan Senate immigration bill, S. 744.¹⁷ Further, children fleeing violence should not be denied opportunities to seek safety in the United States only because they do not have a parent residing in the country. Without these measures, the numbers of children seeking protection under the CAM Program will remain low.

Finally, although the CAM Program is a valuable tool to help facilitate safe transport of refugees, its existence is not a substitute for robust protection screenings. The fact remains that there are many individuals who must flee immediately rather than wait out the prolonged refugee admissions process. For those who reach our border in search of asylum, it is imperative that the U.S. government uphold these individuals' right to pursue asylum protections.

III. The U.S. government must dedicate sufficient resources to uphold due process for asylum seekers.

Although the United States has robust systems in place to address arriving asylum seekers and comprehensively evaluate each application, these systems have struggled for years to function efficiently without adequate resources. Specifically, the U.S. government must dedicate more resources to the immigration courts while ensuring access to counsel for asylum seekers.

a. The immigration court system needs an infusion of resources to ensure its integrity.

Our immigration court system severely lacks the resources necessary for it to run efficiently, with immigration judges who are woefully overworked and understaffed. Judges who participated in a survey conducted by a group of psychiatrists were found to have higher levels of stress, trauma, and turnover than prison guards or physicians in busy hospitals. In his congressional testimony, Immigration Judge Lawrence Burman, who presides over three times as many cases a year as a

¹⁷ Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744), 113th Cong. (Jun. 27, 2013).

federal judge, described the over-saturated system as “doing death-penalty cases in a traffic-court setting.”¹⁸

Due to a hiring freeze, positions were reduced from 272 to 249 immigration judges. Proposals to increase hiring by 225 judges have stalled in Congress, a casualty of the broken appropriations process. As of August 2015, more than half of all immigration judges nationwide were eligible to retire in fiscal year 2015,¹⁹ adding additional stress to a system that already has far more cases than it can effectively manage.

This shortage of resources—combined with an increased caseload driven in significant part by vigorous immigration enforcement efforts in years past—has created an unprecedented backlog in immigration courts. The average wait time to see an immigration judge is now 635 days, but unfortunately, in cities with large immigrant populations like Chicago, the wait time often is longer.²⁰ Just this week, two NIJC asylum cases that were scheduled for asylum trial within the next month were continued; one until 2017 and one indefinitely. These cases involve a Somali young woman and a Coptic Christian from Egypt. Both are strong cases where NIJC was able to identify *pro bono* counsel. Delays such as these—which are common—are traumatic for asylum seekers eager to complete their cases and seek reunification with family members, but also have a chilling effect on *pro bono* attorneys, who struggle to make these very long-term and resource-intensive commitments. While asylum cases await resolution, evidence grows stale, witnesses are lost, and country conditions shift. As a result, cases that were very strong at the outset appear less substantial by the time they go to trial, even when a strong threat of persecution remains.

NIJC began representing Stephen (pseudonym), a political dissident from West Africa, in 2007. He left behind his wife and infant son when he fled to the United States after his life was threatened by his government. After waiting three years for his individual court hearing, the immigration court continued Stephen's hearing for two more years because the judge presiding over his case retired and his case was assigned to a different judge. In response to a motion to advance proceedings filed by Stephen's attorneys, his hearing was moved up by a year and transferred to a new judge; however, the new judge again continued his court date for another year. A month before that hearing was to occur, the court again continued Stephen's case for another year. NIJC managed to exchange dates with another asylum case to secure an earlier date for Stephen, but the judge cancelled court on that date and Stephen was rescheduled for two months later. On that date, the judge heard testimony, but was unable to complete the case and rescheduled it for a date two years later. Stephen's attorneys filed another motion to advance and had a hearing about one year later. On that date, he was granted asylum. Stephen's case was so protracted that by the end, it had been handled by five different pro bono attorneys and was before three different judges. It took six years for him to be granted asylum, during which time he was separated from his wife and child.

Stephen was fortunate his counsel was able to advance his proceedings. An unrepresented asylum seeker would still be waiting for case resolution, enduring family separation, and hoping the years

¹⁸ Eli Saslow, “In a Crowded Immigration Court, Seven Minutes to Decide a Family’s Future,” Washington Post, Feb. 2, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-a-crowded-immigration-court-seven-minutes-to-decide-a-family-future/2014/02/02/518c3c3e-8798-11e3-a5bd-844629433ba3_story.html.

¹⁹ Molly Hennessey-Fiske, “As immigration judges’ working conditions worsen, more may choose retirement,” L.A. Times, Aug. 18, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-immigration-judges-20150818-story.html>.

²⁰ Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, Syracuse University, “Backlog of Pending Cases in Immigration Courts as of August 2015,” http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court_backlog/apprep_backlog.php.

between when he gave his testimony and when the judge anticipated issuing a decision did not prejudice his case.

Despite the obstacles they face and dearth of resources, immigration judges strive to provide expert credibility assessments and discern the veracity of the asylum claims before them. An infusion of resources directed toward the courts would improve this system and enable the courts to deal with asylum cases in a timely and effective manner.

b. Access to legal counsel is critical to ensuring the United States has a strong and efficient asylum system.

Attorneys are particularly critical for navigating the U.S. asylum system, which is legally nuanced and requires considerable resources to support a successful application. An asylum seeker must gather country condition reports, primary documentary evidence, affidavits from witnesses in their home country, and medical and psychological evaluations. One landmark academic study showed that legal representation in immigration court is the most important factor affecting the outcome of an asylum application, with asylum grant rates nearly three times higher for those who have attorneys.²¹ Without legal counsel, it is extremely difficult for asylum seekers to effectively understand and navigate these complex processes in the face of the threat of deportation – and is virtually impossible for children. NIJC clients Maria and Roxana (pseudonyms) were able to obtain relief in the United States with assistance from NIJC's *pro bono* attorneys:

Maria and Roxana are 11- and 14-year old sisters from El Salvador. When they were very small, their parents came to the United States hoping to provide a better life for them and left them in the care of their grandfather. Unbeknownst to the parents, the grandfather neglected and abused the girls until they eventually ran away to live on the streets. With the help of another family member, Maria and Roxana fled to the United States. DHS apprehended them at the border, placed them in removal proceedings, and then transferred them into the custody of the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement until they could be released to their parents in Indiana. Through NIJC, Jessica and Roxana were able to obtain pro bono attorneys to help them understand the immigration process and to identify any potential relief. At their hearing in the Chicago Immigration Court, the immigration judge decided to administratively close Jessica and Roxana's cases, so they can remain with their parents and begin to heal from the abuse they have suffered.

Without representation, these young girls would have been unable to navigate the immigration court system and would have been at risk of deportation to a country where they faced abuse and neglect. Low-cost legal service providers and *pro bono* counsel cannot continue on its current trajectory without additional resources; they are overwhelmed by the demand for legal services and many asylum seekers will either need to proceed with the immigration process alone or turn to unscrupulous preparers and *notarios* in a desperate attempt to get assistance. With so much at stake, vulnerable populations must have access to government-funded counsel to ensure that no one at risk of persecution is returned to harm's way.

²¹ Jaya Ramji-Nogales, *et. al.*, "Refugee Roulette: Disparities in Asylum Adjudication," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 60, Issue 2, p. 340, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=983946.

V. Conclusion

As a nation committed to human rights and due process, we must comply with international and domestic law to ensure that refugees are treated humanely and receive robust access to legal protections. Specifically, the U.S. government must:

1. **Safeguard access to protections for refugees.** The U.S. government must recognize the protection needs of all asylum seekers, regardless of the country from which they flee or where they seek safe haven.
2. **Improve access to the U.S. Refugee Program.** The U.S. government should immediately expand access to the overseas refugee programs for Syrian and Central American refugees alike to provide alternate – but not replacement – paths for the persecuted to reach safety.
3. **Provide additional funding to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) for the immigration courts.** Adequate funding will promote timely and efficient adjudication of asylum applications, thereby providing essential protections to those fleeing harm and allowing for the kind of due process that can identify fraudulent claims while also ensuring a fair hearing.
4. **Appoint counsel to all vulnerable populations in proceedings.** Access to counsel is critical to help vulnerable populations navigate the complex immigration system and increases the efficiency of an already overburdened immigration court system.



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**Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing: Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications
October 1, 2015**

On behalf of the Religious Action Center, the Washington office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, we submit this testimony to make an urgent plea on behalf of the refugees from the horrific violence in Syria and elsewhere in the region who so desperately need our support.

This congressional hearing falls just after the Jewish High Holy Days, when we as a people are engaged in a searching examination of our words and deeds over the past year. This examination, this accounting, is both personal and communal. So while we anticipate the sweetness of the year to come, we are painfully aware of our own shortcomings and those of the world in which we live.

This year, we find it impossible to close our hearts to the plight of the millions of refugees seeking a haven from violence and persecution. And it is impossible to close our eyes without seeing the helpless body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi from Kobani, Syria, whose father is the only living survivor of his family. In our accounting of the past year, we must face the knowledge that we and the world have thus far failed the Kurdi family and others like them, even as we pledge to do better in the year to come.

In our congregations nationwide, rabbis and congregants are eager to respond with compassion and efficacy to the refugee crisis. Many have contacted us eager to sponsor individuals or families of refugees, as is possible under Canadian law and as many of our Canadian congregations are doing. In the absence of that opportunity in the U.S., these congregations have responded with financial donations to relief organizations and robust advocacy initiatives.

Yet the response to this horrific refugee crisis must be international. It cannot be the responsibility of any one entity, nation or even region to address both the crisis's root causes and its effects. At the same time, we are well aware that it will not be easy to formulate or implement an international response. But that difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction in the face of this humanitarian crisis. Our great nation must respond immediately by providing safety, food, shelter, refuge, and dignity to refugees of all religious heritages. How can a nation built by refugees from political persecution turn our back on refugees fleeing religious and political persecution? It cannot. We commend President Obama for increasing the number of refugees to be accepted in 2016 and 2017, but unfortunately the new numbers are not enough to respond to the global challenge before us. We stand ready to do our part, but we know, as you must, that what is required first and foremost is governmental action.

Last week, Jews gathered in synagogues around the world to stand alongside others in the community before our loving God and hold ourselves accountable for our actions and for our inactions. This is a deeply spiritual experience, but it is not one that should be limited to the Jewish people. Every human being must ask him or herself what more can be done to help those in desperate need. Every human being, including and perhaps especially those who hold public office and make decisions about our nation's priorities and actions, must act with courage and compassion. We pray that we as a nation will rise to meet this challenge, and will all be found to have lived up to our responsibility to care for the poor, the needy, and the stranger among us.



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.



Dear Honorable Members of the United States Congress,

As religious leaders from a variety of backgrounds, we are called by our sacred texts and faith traditions to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the sojourner. War, conflict and persecution have forced people to leave their homes, creating more refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people than at any other time in history. According to a recent United Nations report, 60 million people are currently displaced – 1 in every 122 people on earth.

This nation has an urgent moral responsibility to receive refugees and asylum seekers who are in dire need of safety. Today, with more than four million Syrian refugees fleeing violence and persecution, the United States has an ethical obligation as a world leader to reduce this suffering and generously welcome Syrian refugees into our country. This is why we are calling on the Obama Administration and U.S. Congress to show bold leadership and increase the number of Syrians refugees resettled in the United States, in addition to the recently announced global resettlement admission numbers. The United States has a rich history as a leader in refugee resettlement, with significant precedent, including after World War II and after the fall of Saigon.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of any religious tradition who face persecution on account of the reasons enumerated under U.S. law. We write today to specifically state opposition to any legislation or proposal that would prevent Muslim refugees and individuals from other faiths from accessing the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Proposals that would have the U.S. State Department perform a religious litmus test on people fleeing persecution fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

As the United States joins the world in seeking ways to meaningfully respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is paramount that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) stay true to its mandate to resettle the most vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals from a host of religions, ethnicities and backgrounds have been and should continue to be resettled in the United States.

Together, representing our various faiths, we decry derogatory language that has been used about our Muslim friends and neighbors. Inflammatory rhetoric has no place in our response to this humanitarian crisis. We ask our elected officials and candidates for office to recognize that new Americans of all faiths and backgrounds contribute to our economy, our community, and our congregations. Refugees are an asset to this country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

As people of faith, our values call us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable, regardless of their religion. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts. We urge you to be bold in choosing moral, just policies that provide refuge for vulnerable individuals seeking protection.

Sincerely,

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Rev. Dr. Mary Petrina Boyd, Pastor, Langley United Methodist Church

John J. Shaffer, United Methodist Clergy, Pacific Northwest Conference, Retired Rev. Thomas

Quigley, Retired Ecumenical Executive

Rev. Christopher Gudger-Raines

Rev. Dr. Kathryn A. Morse, Pastor, Vashon United Methodist Church

Rev. Meredith Manning Brown, Lead Pastor, Evergreen United Methodist Church, Lacey Rev. Richenda

Fairhurst, Camas United Methodist Church

Wisconsin

Bishop Gerald L. Mansholt, East Central Synod of Wisconsin, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Rev. Dr. Dan R.

Dick, Assistant to the Bishop, ELCA

Rev. Vance Elzinga, Faith Reformed Church

Very Reverend Philip D. Reifenberg, J.C.L., Pastor, St. Dominic Catholic Church, Sheboygan Member, Muslim Catholic
Dialogue in Milwaukee

Rev. Tonen O'Connor, Resident Priest Emerita, Milwaukee Zen Center

Dr. Waleed S. Najeeb, President SAMS-WI (Syrian American Medical Society- WI Chapter) Rev. Deacon Nancy

Lanman, Central United Methodist Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin Annual

Conference

Pardeep Kaleka, Sikh Temple of Wisconsin



Written Testimony for the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration's hearing on
the Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program

October 1, 2015

Michael Klosson, Vice President, Public Policy and Humanitarian Response
Save the Children

Thank you for organizing today's hearing on the Administration's FY2016 Refugee Resettlement Program. Now, more than ever, US leadership is needed to address the needs of massive numbers of children and families fleeing conflict around the world, including by increasing the resettlement of refugees in the United States.

Children and families are on the move in unprecedented numbers, creating the highest level of displacement across the world and in Europe since World War II. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 442,400 people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea so far this year – almost sixty percent more than made the same perilous passage in 2014. The majority of refugees are leaving the brutal conflict in Syria and other turbulent nations including Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and Nigeria. The conflict in Syria alone has seen more than 4 million people flee the country. Refugees, who have to date found safety in neighboring countries, are facing declining humanitarian aid, dwindling resources and pressure either to return to Syria or seek protection across borders.

Now in its fifth year and with no political solution on the horizon, the Syria conflict has been characterized by the UN Secretary-General as the largest humanitarian and peace and security crisis in the world today. It is now beginning to command the attention it requires from world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly where I have been for the past week. More than 250,000 people have been killed, including over 11,000 children, and more than one million have been injured. The UN estimates that 12.2 million people inside Syria are in need of assistance, including more than 5.7 million children. The conflict has taken a heavy toll on children, who have suffered immensely amidst violence, destruction and deprivation.

We know first-hand the urgency of the situation. Save the Children programs are already serving millions of displaced people and refugees across the Middle East, including in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Yemen. We have reached over 3 million people – including 2 million children -- inside Syria and in neighboring countries since the conflict began. We are now working along the entire route that refugees are taking including transit countries such as Greece, Italy, Serbia and Hungary as well as destination countries including Germany, France, England, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.

Despite the staggering human toll of the Syrian conflict, it has so far failed to galvanize the sustained international leadership and engagement required to resolve it politically. Although Congress and the Administration have mobilized leadership and significant funding to address this challenge, more is necessary to relieve the suffering of millions of children and families. To address this crisis, Save the Children urges the U.S. government to:

- Admit up to 100,000 Syrian refugees and increase the annual ceiling for refugee admissions to 200,000 in FY16 as part of a significantly stepped up effort by Europeans and others to resettle a total of at least 200,000 Syrian refugees;
- Robustly fund humanitarian assistance programs and long term resources for Syria and neighboring countries, with a special focus on providing quality education for refugee children and employment opportunities in host countries; and
- Support a reinvigorated political process to end the crisis in Syria

Resettlement

The displacement of vulnerable people resulting from the Syrian conflict is only one part of a larger global refugee crisis. According to UNHCR, 59.5 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes in the last year alone – the highest level ever recorded. This includes more than 19 million refugees worldwide, including 4 million registered Syrian refugees. The current situation is a true humanitarian crisis and requires more than a “business as usual” approach. Children are losing their lives and being subjected to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect at sea and land borders across the world in Europe, the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, in Central America, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

The recent announcement that the Administration will increase its cap on the number of refugees it admits to 85,000 in the coming fiscal year and to 100,000 in FY2017 is a step in the right direction, but much more must be done to meet the urgent needs and to give expression to our fundamental commitment as a nation to be a refuge for people being persecuted. The Administration’s current commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrians amounts to only 4 days worth of the Syrian exodus; on average 2,500 people per day fled the country in 2014. This is why Save the Children joins others in calling for the annual ceiling of refugee admissions to be increased and for the United States to resettle 200,000 refugees in the next fiscal year, something the U.S. has done in earlier periods when the number of refugees has soared. In light of the current dire situation in Syria, we specifically call for the US to admit up to 100,000 Syrians in FY16. We also call on other nations to shoulder their responsibility as well so the international community as a whole resettles at least 200,000 Syrian refugees by next year.

Committing to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees is not an unprecedented policy. For example, after the Vietnam War, the United States made large and rapid readjustments to

domestic refugee resettlement programs¹ in order to resettle more than 100,000 refugees fleeing the war in 1979 and resettle over 200,000 in 1980.² Around the same time, the United States took in more than 120,000 Cuban refugees, including more than 80,000 in one month.³ We recognize that resettling additional numbers of refugees would require ramped up support for screening and processing in order to vet and place large numbers of applicants, but, as history proves, the United States has done it before and can do so again. Resettling 100,000 Syrian refugees would still account for less than 3 percent of the total number of Syrian refugees, but it would send a strong message to other countries that bold action is required and that the US is willing to do its part. This is the kind of leadership we need from the United States today.

Humanitarian and development assistance.

In addition to increasing the resettlement of refugees, the US must also continue to play a leadership role in addressing the dire situation that is forcing Syrian families to take such desperate measures in the first place.

Since the beginning of the conflict, children have been the forgotten victims of Syria's horrific war. Today, over 5 million children are affected by the conflict, including over 2 million children who have sought refuge in neighboring countries. These children are at risk of becoming a "lost generation," and must not be ignored.

Inside Syria, children are subjected to horrific violence, grave violations of their rights and deprivation from basic needs and services. Our recent report, *Education Under Attack, documented how schools are being deliberately targeted inside Syria. Half of all attacks on education across the world over the past four years in fact took place in Syria. Access to the millions in need, moreover, is made difficult due to insecurity with 4.8 million living in areas that are hard to reach and 422,000 living under siege. As families exhaust their assets and plunge into deeper poverty, recruitment into armed groups, early marriage, child labor and other forms of exploitation are exceptionally high and exacerbate the trauma suffered by children who have experienced over four years of war.*

Children living in neighboring countries are also suffering, with the majority of refugee children not attending schools. More than 700,000 refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt are out of school because national education systems cannot cope with the influx of students. In addition, most refugees are unable to access legal income earning opportunities to meet daily needs. These restrictions, coupled with decreasing levels of humanitarian assistance from UN agencies are pushing refugee families further into destitution and heightening associated child protection risks. These forces are prompting families to make desperate choices to risk it all in taking to sea in rickety boats to reach Europe. Governments

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/3ebf9bad0.pdf>

² According to Refugee Council USA, the U.S. resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and 207,000 in 1980.

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/world/middleeast/obama-directs-administration-to-accept-10000-syrian-refugees.html>

and communities in Syria's neighboring countries continue to show extraordinary generosity, but the situation is reaching a breaking point.

In this context, education and child protection programming are critical to help rescue a generation of Syrian children from lives of despair and broken futures. To this end, Save the Children has joined together with UNICEF, UNHCR, World Vision and other partners in the "No Lost Generation" campaign to address the enormous humanitarian needs of children in the region. With this initiative, we seek to accelerate donor and public support for programs that help Syrian children inside and outside of the country to gain access to quality education, protect them from violence and abuse, provide counseling and psychological support, and meet other critical needs.

In order to support the needs of children, Save the Children asks for the US to continue and increase its leadership of the humanitarian response in Syria and surrounding countries by pledging more humanitarian and development assistance. Assistance should include support for longer term development measures that protect children, provide quality education for refugee children and promote employment opportunities for youth and adults in host countries. Specifically, Save the Children calls for the U.S. government to allocate no less than \$3.059 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account and \$1.895 billion for the International Disaster Assistance Account in FY16. In addition, we urge Congress to consider emergency funding for a two-pronged strategy to provide immediate humanitarian relief and to increase the capacity of the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security to manage, including through thorough vetting, the 200,000 target for FY 2016 refugee admissions into the United States.

Protect Children through Diplomatic Action

Ultimately, ending the conflict in Syria is the only way to end the refugee flow and build a better future for Syria's children. We hope meetings this week in New York at the United Nations will translate into world leaders stepping up efforts to find an end to the conflict and violence in Syria in the near term – without that, all other measures are only stop gaps and children and their families will continue to suffer until a political solution is found. The US needs to prioritize a reinvigorated peace process that supports the UN and brings in key regional stakeholders to drive forward a diplomatic conclusion. Decisive action by the international community is needed now to facilitate a peaceful end to the violence.

* * *

I would like to thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to present testimony on this important issue. Save the Children welcomes the US for the leadership it has shown so far, but the scale of the global displacement crisis demands even more urgent and escalated action, including by increasing the number of slots for refugees to be resettled in the United States. We look forward to working with Congress to help the next generation of Syrians and other refugees who are seeking a better life, a mission we have pursued together with the U.S. government through so many other humanitarian crises over the past decade.

Written Testimony of Catherine Orsborn, Director of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

**Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee for the Hearing Record on
"Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications"**

October 1, 2015; 2:00 pm

I would like to thank Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, and members of the Judiciary Committee for providing the opportunity to submit this statement on the need to address the Syrian refugee crisis. As I will discuss below, this is an issue that is too often clouded by misinformation and prejudice, and I welcome the opportunity to expand the conversation of this critical topic.

I bring before you today the collective voices of 31 different religious denominations and organizations, the members of the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign to combat anti-Muslim bigotry. We are calling on the United States government to respond generously in the face of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, and urging public officials to refrain from bigoted and discriminatory rhetoric and approaches in this response. The magnitude of the Syrian crisis is daunting, and the U.S. must help to lead a global response that honors the human dignity of each and every person seeking freedom from the violent conditions in Syria today.

As religious leaders, it is deeply concerning to our coalition that we too often hear this crisis discussed in terms of U.S. national security instead of our moral and humanitarian commitment to the least among us. We are of course concerned with safeguarding the national security of our nation, but too much of this rhetoric is a smokescreen for bigotry and prejudice. Elected officials have referred to the refugee resettlement system as a "Trojan horse" for terrorist groups. Such claims are unfounded, as the resettlement program is one of the most difficult ways to enter our country. Syrians from all backgrounds are leaving some of the most horrific conditions imaginable to find security for themselves and their communities; their human security is the security that is most threatened at the moment. We must not talk about Syrian refugees as "security threats," politicizing their plight, but we should talk about them as human beings who, as such, deserve our respect and compassion.

We do a disservice to our nation's values if we allow religious prejudice to influence our response to this crisis. Our nation's mandate in resettling

refugees is to prioritize the most vulnerable. The most vulnerable of those fleeing Syria are from a number of different religious and ethnic backgrounds- this includes religious minorities and Muslims alike. All of whom are fleeing the horrific conditions in Syria today; all of whom are searching for peace and security for themselves and their families. To paint Muslim refugees in particular as security threats on the basis of their religious identity is bigoted and defies the compassion with which we as Americans of different faith traditions should approach those asking for our help.

We thus lift our voices to call upon our elected officials to recognize the human dignity of Syrians reaching out for global support in this time of great need. We call on our elected officials to refrain from politicizing their plight and to instead reach into the wells of our own national values to find the courage and compassion to extend a welcoming hand to those seeking refuge without religious or ethnic discrimination in so doing.

U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST
OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FY 2016 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT
PROGRAM: FISCAL AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD

By James Simpson
Center for Security Policy

As cities and towns across America brace for a wave of unvetted¹ Syrian refugees, with the prospect of bringing in ISIS fighters seeded among them,² the resettlement program itself is being called into question.³ The United States already takes in more refugees than all other resettlement countries combined. Communities are increasingly overwhelmed with needy populations from the world over. They bring with them diseases not previously or at least not recently seen in the United States, and often fail to assimilate with respect to language and culture.

Citizens and state and local officials have expressed alarm over the many burdens refugee populations create and have repeatedly called for a moratorium. These cries have fallen on deaf ears. The nine refugee resettlement contractors, so-called Voluntary Agencies, or VOLAGs – paid by the head to resettle refugees – lobby for even greater numbers, and blithely dump refugees in overloaded communities, leaving local government to deal with it. When challenged, those in charge of the program, from top federal officials down to local resettlement contractors, display contempt for citizens that can only be described as breathtaking.

This crisis has reached a head. The federal government spends as much as \$10 billion annually on various forms of public assistance to house, feed and otherwise support refugees and Central American illegals.⁴ This does not include other welfare-dependent developing world immigrant

¹ “We don’t have it under control,” Mr. Michael Steinback, Assistant Director for the FBI told the [House Homeland Security committee [in a hearing in February, 2015]. “Absolutely, we’re doing the best we can. If I were to say that we had it under control, then I would say I know of every single individual traveling. I don’t. And I don’t know every person there and I don’t know everyone coming back. So it’s not even close to being under control.” See: Kerry Pickett, “Flashback: FBI – No Way To Vet Incoming Syrian Refugees [VIDEO],” *Daily Caller*, September 11, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://dailycaller.com/2015/09/11/flashback-fbi-no-way-to-vet-incoming-syrian-refugees-video/#ixzz3n8tNoXXp>.

² “An operative working for Islamic State has revealed the terror group has successfully smuggled thousands of covert jihadists into Europe. The Syrian operative claimed more than 4,000 covert ISIS gunmen had been smuggled into western nations – hidden amongst innocent refugees. The ISIS smuggler, who is in his thirties and is described as having a trimmed jet-black beard, revealed the ongoing clandestine operation is a complete success. “Just wait,” he smiled.” Aaron Brown “‘Just wait...’ Islamic State reveals it has smuggled THOUSANDS of extremists into Europe,” *Express (UK)*, September 10, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/555434/Islamic-State-ISIS-Smugler-THOUSANDS-Extremists-into-Europe-Refugees>.

³ See for instance, Ann Corcoran, “Refugee Resettlement and the Hijra to America,” *Center for Security Policy Press*, March 30, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Refugee_Resettlement_Hijra.pdf.

⁴ See James Simpson, “The Red-Green Axis: Refugees, Immigration, and the Agenda to Erase America,” *Center for Security Policy Press*, July 15, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Red_Green_Axis.pdf, 13; also see Ann Corcoran, “What does the refugee resettlement

programs such as Diversity Visas (about 45,000 per year); Cuban/Haitian Entrants (about 20,000 per year) and others.⁵

After over thirty years of refugee placements, we have:

- Epidemic welfare fraud, crime, gang, drug and assimilation problems
- Numerous instances of “thoroughly vetted” refugees implicated in terrorism
- A Minnesota Somali population of 36,000 or more in which there have been an alarming number of cases of ISIS recruitment
- More and more individual cases like that of a Portland, Maine Christian African found tortured and murdered in August with a blood-spattered bible next to his head in a vicious attack that police said “took place over several hours”, allegedly by three Somali refugees⁶ or a seven-year-old refugee girl living in Salt Lake City, UT, refugee housing brutally raped and murdered by a Burmese Muslim refugee living in the same complex⁷

Local leaders report:

- Local governments receive no federal or state dollars to support refugee populations
- Adults refuse to learn English and rely on welfare
- Public housing wait lists stretched from weeks to years *for Americans*. Refugees go to the front of the line
- Language problems plague public schools:
 - 82 languages are now spoken in the Manchester, NH high school
 - Manchester schools bottom in state ratings because refugees cannot pass tests
 - 45 languages are now spoken in Maine public schools
 - Lewiston, Maine English Language Learners (ELL) budget has grown 4000% since the year 2000
 - 60 languages are now spoken in Lynn, Mass. public schools; many resettled Central Americans speak unknown village dialects⁸

And while Americans struggle to make ends meet in Obama’s America, while veterans wait months or even years to receive treatment, refugees go to the front of the line to receive a menu

program cost taxpayers?” *Refugee Resettlement Watch*, October 29, 2014, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com/2014/10/29/what-does-the-refugee-resettlement-program-cost-us-taxpayers/>.

⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

⁶ Kenya Sinclair, “Christian man beaten to death by Muslim refugees in Maine,” *Catholic Online*, August 28, 2015, accessed September 30, 2015.

⁷ “‘She was my only one’: Refugee family sob in court as gruesome photos of their seven-year-old daughter ‘raped and beaten to death by neighbor, 26,’ are shown at his trial,” *Daily Mail (UK)*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2536594/Burmese-refugee-family-share-heartbreak-gruesome-photos-7-year-old-daughter-raped-beaten-death-neighbor-26-shown-trial.html>, accessed, September 30, 2015.

⁸ Information provided to author by mayors of Manchester, NH, Lynn, MA, Lewiston, ME mayor’s office, and Lewiston public school budget documents.

of benefits unavailable to Americans anywhere. According to promises made by one VOLAG, this includes:

- a furnished home
- help with rent
- health care
- nutritious, affordable food
- English language classes
- help building job, computer & financial literacy skills
- education for their children
- social services and community support
- legal services toward residency & citizenship⁹

Yet, despite these generous benefits, supposedly designed to help make refugees “self-sufficient”, a substantial proportion remain on the dole indefinitely.¹⁰ This fact is obscured by the special definition of “self-sufficiency” applied to refugees. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), economic self-sufficiency means “earning a total income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant.”¹¹

Non-cash benefits are excluded from the count. Thus a refugee can be termed “economically self-sufficient” while receiving food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, and other non-cash benefits. Conspicuously, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is not listed among “cash assistance,” and while SSI is supposedly limited to elderly or disabled individuals, the standards have been greatly loosened over the years, and some refugees game the system.¹²

But even that is not the end of it. There are dozens of ORR grants available to refugees for every conceivable activity, including a dollar-for-dollar matching grant when a refugee opens a savings account. Finally, despite all the talk of compassionate support for refugees, VOLAGs regularly abandon them after a few months, expecting the welfare system to handle them. Local communities are left holding the bag.

Most damning are the cases of refugees discovered to be terrorists, criminals or sexual deviants. The State Department assures us its vetting process is sound. However, since last year at this time, there have been 58 terrorist plots either intercepted or launched. Almost all of the

⁹ See multiple International Rescue Committee sites, including in Dallas, San Diego, Atlanta, Tucson, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Baltimore, Phoenix, Los Angeles, for example <http://www.rescue.org/us-program/us-dallas-tx>, accessed September 30, 2015.

¹⁰ Simpson, Op. cit., 12.

¹¹ “Refugee Resettlement: Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholders Could Strengthen Program,” *GAO*, 12-729, July 2012, accessed September 27, 2012, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/592975.pdf>, Footnote, p. 3.

¹² Ann Corcoran, “Somalis ripping-off welfare and health care in Maine; so what else is new!,” *Refugee Resettlement Watch*, December 24, 2009, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com/2009/12/24/somalis-ripping-off-welfare-and-health-care-in-maine-so-what-else-is-new/>.

perpetrators were Muslim men. Two of these have been positively identified as refugees.¹³ The Tsarnaev brothers, who launched the deadly 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, came to the U.S. originally under the refugee program, as did Mohammad Youssuf Abdulzeez, the man who killed four Marines and a Sailor in Chattanooga, TN last July.¹⁴

In 2012, two Kentucky men were arrested for planning attacks on U.S. soil. Both were Iraqi refugees. It was later learned that these men planted IEDs in Iraq when fingerprints matching one of the suspects were found on an unexploded roadside bomb. The two were responsible for at least 6 deaths of U.S. service members in Iraq and by their own admission planned to visit much more damage on U.S. citizens here.¹⁵

A recent poll reveals that 51 percent of American Muslims believe that “Muslims in America should have the choice of being governed according to shariah.”¹⁶ In Germany, many refugee housing complexes are already ruled by shariah – the Koran-based legal system. Christians are heavily oppressed, some claiming they live like prisoners, while others seek to return home. Max Klingberg of the International Society for Human Rights, who works with refugees in Germany, says:

We must rid ourselves of the illusion that all those who arrive here are human rights activists. Among the new arrivals is not a small amount of religious intensity, it is at least at the level of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷

Today, about 95 percent of refugees resettled in the U.S. are chosen by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who received broad authority in the 1980 Refugee Act to select refugees. The UNHCR in turn is heavily influenced by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a 56 nation organization that is second only in size to the U.N.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, about 100,000 Muslims immigrate to the U.S. legally every year, representing the fastest growing population of legal immigrants, according to Pew Research Center. The Muslim share

¹³ “Publicly Identified Cases Involving a Nexus to Terrorism from July 2, 2014, through August 11, 2015”, *U.S. Senate, Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest*, accessed, September 26, 2015, http://www.sessions.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/635eb1f5-57bc-4726-a87d-08729289f8b3/publicly-identified-cases-involving-a-nexus-to-terrorism-14-15.pdf.

¹⁴ David Greenfield, “Muslim Killer of Marines was Son of ‘Palestinian’ Refugee Living in US,” *FrontPage Magazine*, July 16, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/point/259499/muslim-killer-marines-was-son-palestinian-refugee-daniel-greenfield>.

¹⁵ “RELEASE: Former Iraqi Terrorists Living in Kentucky Sentenced for Terrorist Activities,” *FBI*, January 29, 2013, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/louisville/press-releases/2013/former-iraqi-terrorists-living-in-kentucky-sentenced-for-terrorist-activities>.

¹⁶ “RELEASE: Poll of U.S. Muslims Reveals Ominous Levels Of Support For Islamic Supremacists’ Doctrine of Shariah, Jihad,” *Center for Security Policy*, June 23, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2015/06/23/nationwide-poll-of-us-muslims-shows-thousands-support-shariah-jihad/>.

¹⁷ Liam Deacon, “Germany Segregating Christians As Migrant Violence Escalates,” *Breitbart London*, September 28, 2015, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/09/28/germany-segregating-christians-as-migrant-violence-escalates/>.

¹⁸ “NGO Law Monitor: Organization of Islamic Cooperation,” *ICNL.org*, August 10, 2015, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/oic.html>.

of immigration has doubled since 1992.¹⁹ Including refugees, asylum seekers and temporary workers, that number has almost tripled, to 280,000.²⁰

With the Syrian refugee crisis making front page news, the UNHCR called for resettlement of 130,000 Syrians throughout the resettlement nations of the West. The VOLAGs' lobbying arm, the Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) immediately began pushing for half, 65,000 to be resettled in the U.S. Almost on cue 14 U.S. senators reiterated the demand. But even that didn't satisfy the VOLAGs. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a taxpayer-paid VOLAG originally set up to resettle Jewish refugees, said that America should resettle as many as 200,000 Syrians,²¹ in spite of reports that Syrian refugees remain implacable foes of Israel and may carry anti-Semitic violence with them to their new homes.²²

The Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service (LIRS), which collects 97% of its income from U.S. taxpayers, has demanded that U.S. taxpayers resettle 100,000 Syrians, and to raise the overall cap on refugees from 70,000 to 200,000.²³ This demand for 100,000 Syrians has now been parroted by the other VOLAGs²⁴ as well as 72 House Democrats,²⁵ and now even Moveon.org.²⁶

These strident demands have not been made in a vacuum. The FBI testified that Syrian refugees cannot be vetted for jihadist connections because Syria is a "failed state."²⁷ Director of National

¹⁹ "The Religious Affiliation of U.S. Immigrants: Majority Christian, Rising Share of Other Faiths," *Pew Research Center*, May 17, 2013, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/#affiliation>.

²⁰ Report: Muslims Are the Fastest Growing Immigrant Community, *Breitbart*, September 22, 2015, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/09/22/report-muslim-immigration-fastest-growing-bloc-u-s-immigration/>.

²¹ Ann Corcoran, "Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society says we may have to admit 200,000 Syrian refugees," *Refugee Resettlement Watch*, June 26, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com/2015/06/26/hebrew-immigrant-aid-society-says-we-may-have-to-admit-200000-syrian-refugees/>.

²² JTA, "Refugees may import anti-Semitism, Jewish critic says," *Times of Israel*, September 9, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/refugees-may-import-anti-semitism-jewish-critic-says/>.

²³ Ann Corcoran, "Lutherans call for 200,000 refugees to be admitted to US in 2016 including 100,000 Syrians," *Refugee Resettlement Watch*, September 4, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com/2015/09/04/lutherans-call-for-200000-refugees-to-be-admitted-to-us-in-2016-including-100000-syrians/>.

²⁴ Elise Foley, "Refugee Organizations Call for U.S. to Take in 100,000 Syrians," September 8, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-organizations-syrians-us_55ef4f47e4b03784e276f8b1.

²⁵ Elise Foley, "Lawmakers, refugee groups to Obama: Accepting 10,000 Syrians is not enough," *Huffington Post*, September 11, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/10000-syrians-congress-refugee-groups_55f2eb12e4b077ca094eb7df.

²⁶ Brian Stewart, "Moveon urges Obama Administration to increase the number of Syrian refugees to at least 100,000 by the end of 2015", *MoveOn.org*, September 10, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://front.moveon.org/moveon-urges-obama-administration-to-increase-the-number-of-syrian-refugees-to-at-least-100000-by-end-of-2015/#.VgrBLPIVikq>.

²⁷ "Rep. John Katko, R-N.Y., asked [Michael Steinbach, deputy assistant director of the FBI's counter terrorism unit] if he could suggest ways to go about getting this vital background information that would separate legitimate refugees from those who may be seeking to enter the U.S. to harm Americans. "I just don't think you can go and get it," Steinbach said. "You're talking about a country that's a failed state, does not have any infrastructure so to speak. So all the data sets, the police, the intel services, that you would normally go to and seek that information, don't

Intelligence James Clapper has said that the potential for ISIS or other terrorist groups to seed jihadists in the refugee stream is “a huge concern.”²⁸ ISIS claims to have 4,000 members already in Europe.²⁹ One poll even found 1/5th of Syrians claim ISIS is a positive force in the world.³⁰ Yet Ann Richard, State Department Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration, has announced that the (nonexistent) vetting process for Syrian refugees will be “streamlined.”

As a final outrage, a recently released report by the Department of Homeland Security reveals that in 2014 the administration gave permanent residency or asylum to 1,519 foreigners who provided material assistance to terrorists. The administration claims the individuals were a special case because the assistance was provided “under duress”.³¹ Judicial Watch observes:

Before the Obama administration tweaked a federal law last year, these foreign nationals would have been banned from the country for supporting terrorist causes. But under the changes the Secretary of Homeland Security has “discretionary authority” to waive certain grounds of inadmissibility relating to terrorism. We’ve seen this discretionary authority abused in the last few years and in fact, the administration has eliminated a zero tolerance policy for granting asylum or residency to individuals who have provided any sort of terrorism-related support.³²

The administration has stated it will increase the refugee caps 15,000 this year and 30,000 next year, allowing for at least 45,000 Syrian refugees. But Obama has said they will use other programs, like parole, asylum, and temporary protected status to allow even more. Thus the VOLAGs may get their wish, as outlandish as it seems. The Presidential Determination letter, published September 29, lists a 2016 cap of 34,000 from the “Near East/South Asia” region, which would include Syria.³³

Understandably this has generated widespread concern about U.S. national security. But resettlement managers react with galling contempt. At a public meeting on September 22 to discuss concerns about placement of Syrian refugees in Twin Falls, Idaho, Larry Bartlett, Director of Refugee Admissions for the State Department, said:

exist.” “And that obviously raises a grave concern of being able to do proper background checks on individuals coming into the country?” Katko asked. “Yes,” Steinbach responded.” From Leo Hohmann, “Syrian Refugee Program Called ‘Back Door for Jihadists,’” *WND*, February 13, 2015, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.wnd.com/2015/02/syrian-refugee-program-called-back-door-for-jihadists/#Xt4eJFXgfiXc5Ejq.99>.

²⁸ Guy Taylor, “James Clapper: Islamic State could infiltrate U.S., West through migrants fleeing from Syria,” *The Washington Times*, September 9, 2015, accessed September 28, 2015,

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/sep/9/james-clapper-islamic-state-could-infiltrate-us-we/>.

²⁹ Aaron Brown, *Express (UK)*, Op. cit.

³⁰ Nick Gutteridge, “Fifth of Syrians say ISIS are the GOOD GUYS amid fears Europe is wide open to terrorists,” *Express (UK)*, September 16, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015,

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/605560/European-migrant-crisis-Syrians-ISIS-good-guys-refugees-Britain-Cameron>.

³¹ “U.S. Gives 1,519 Engaged in Terrorism ‘While Under Duress’ Residency, Asylum,” *Judicial Watch*, September 29, 2014, accessed September 29, 2015, http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2015/09/u-s-gives-1519-engaged-in-terrorism-while-under-duress-residency-asylum/?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “RELEASE: Presidential Determination -- Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016,” *The White House*, September 29, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/29/presidential-determination-presidential-determination-refugee-admissions>.

We would not bring refugees to any city in the United States that *wasn't going to be safe for the refugee to come to*. And I put a little twist on that on purpose. The people of Twin Falls think the refugees are unsafe. I certainly, as someone who is resettling a refugee, would not take them to a place where I felt *the refugee himself* was going to be unsafe.³⁴

This kind of statement is not isolated to a few ill-tempered bureaucrats, but is rather part of a premeditated, organized effort to discredit anyone as a “racist,” “xenophobe,” or “nativist” if they dare question the resettlement program. And this effort is being underwritten by the very same U.S. taxpayers being so arrogantly defamed.

A report titled “*Resettlement at Risk: Meeting Emerging Challenges to Refugee Resettlement in Local Communities*,” has been produced by HIAS. It describes the increasing backlash against the refugee resettlement program, as myriad problems and skyrocketing costs swamp more and more communities.³⁵ This outrageous report addresses none of these concerns but instead recommends higher funding levels for the program along with a coordinated effort to:

- **“Conduct research on local anti-refugee leaders.** The national refugee agencies should partner with groups such as the *Center for New Community* and the *Southern Poverty Law Center* to learn more about individuals and groups leading local efforts to resist resettlement, to determine if they belong to organized anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim organizations or networks.”³⁶
- **“‘[M]onitor’ state legislatures** for ‘anti-refugee action.’”³⁷
- **“Get organized.** . . . [L]aunch a funded, productive, organizing initiative, coordinated nationally but strongly rooted in local action to raise awareness. . . . about the benefits of resettlement and proactively prevent resettlement backlash.”³⁸
- **“Develop a rapid-response team plan”** for “supporting local efforts to organize and fight anti-resettlement measures in their communities.”³⁹

It is highly problematic, to say the least, that VOLAGs such as HIAS are advocating or supporting such tactics, underwritten by American taxpayer dollars, and are doing so seemingly without any regard for the welfare of American citizens. The Southern Poverty Law Center is well known for its long association with communists and other extreme left hate merchants.⁴⁰ The Chicago-based Center for New Community has already published two defamatory screeds:

³⁴ Vicki Davis, “The meeting before the meeting,” *TVOI News*, September 26, 2015, accessed September 28, 2005, <http://www.tvoinews.com/categories/writers/the-meeting-before-the-meeting-vicky-davis/>.

³⁵ Melanie Nezer, “Resettlement at Risk: Meeting Emerging Challenges to Refugee Resettlement in Local Communities,” *HIAS*, 2013 Accessed September 27, 2005, https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/resettlement_at_risk_1.pdf, 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 16-17.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ James Simpson, “Southern Poverty Law Center: Wellspring of Manufactured Hate,” *Capital Research Center*, October 7, 2012, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://capitalresearch.org/2012/10/southern-poverty-law-center-wellspring-of-manufactured-hate/>.

Islamophobia, the New Nativism, and the Islamophobia Reference Guide, which identifies prominent conservative individuals by name.

VOLAGs received between \$1 and \$2 billion in 2014 to resettle refugees, and adults and children under the unaccompanied alien children program (UAC).⁴¹ This is very big business. It was not always so. Prior to the Refugee Act of 1980, non-profits involved in refugee resettlement provided help out of their own donation dollars. These were true acts of charity. Following enactment of the Act, that all changed. According to the GAO, VOLAGs are incentivized to maintain or raise refugee numbers:

One state refugee coordinator noted that local affiliate funding is based on the number of refugees they serve, so affiliates have an incentive to maintain or increase the number of refugees they resettle each year rather than allowing the number to decrease.⁴²

In 1999, the Clinton administration resettled approximately 20,000 Kosovar Albanians to the U.S., supposedly to protect them from ethnic cleansing being conducted by the Serbs during the Kosovo War. The administration ignored the UNHCR, the Government of Macedonia (where camps for Kosovar refugees had been established), U.S. government agencies in charge of refugee resettlement and even the refugees themselves, all of which *opposed resettlement*.

The future Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, David M. Robinson, wrote at the time:

In fact, the United States, the UNHCR, and other "refugee friendly" countries like Canada and Australia consider resettlement *as the last and least desirable alternative* for persons fleeing persecution. Preferred options are eventual repatriation when conditions permit or local integration within the region of flight."⁴³

But there was one group that adamantly supported it, the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs (CMRA), which was the VOLAGs' lobbying organization. (It has since been superseded by RCUSA). Robinson said of CMRA:

[T]en agencies⁴⁴ ... form a single body called the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs (CMRA). The CMRA wields enormous influence over the Administration's refugee admissions policy. It lobbies the Hill effectively to increase the number of refugees admitted for permanent resettlement each year and at the same time provides overseas processing for admissions under contract to the State Department. In fact, the federal government provides about ninety percent of its collective budget. If there is a conflict of interest, it is never mentioned...

⁴¹ Simpson, Op. cit. 20-21.

⁴² "Refugee Resettlement — Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholders Could Strengthen Program," Op. cit., 12.

⁴³ David M. Robinson, "How Public Opinion Shaped Refugee Policy in Kosovo," *National Defense University, National War College, Course 5603, Seminar L*, 2000. 4.

⁴⁴ Today there are nine agencies. The tenth was, oddly, the State of Iowa.

The solution its members offer to every refugee crisis is simplistic and the same: increase the number of admissions to the United States without regard to budgets or competing foreign policy considerations. On the other hand, it is politically well connected, includes major party donors at the local and national levels, and owns the moral high ground on an extremely emotional issue. The United States is, after all, a country of immigrants and refugees. Saying "no" to the CMRA is tantamount to defacing the Statue of Liberty.⁴⁵

The RCUSA and all the VOLAGs continue to operate by the same playbook. With strategies like those outlined in *Resettlement at Risk* they attempt to convince the public that refugee resettlement is as American as apple pie and vilify anyone who disagrees.

Efforts to rein them in have thus far failed. In twelve states and San Diego County, CA, VOLAGs control the entire program from top to bottom. These are the so-called "Wilson-Fish" states, named after the two congressmen who wrote the law. Tennessee, a Wilson-Fish state, has been a major resettlement target for decades. Concerned citizens were finally able to obtain passage of a law in 2011 that promised to offer relief to overburdened communities. The *Refugee Absorptive Capacity Act* required the VOLAGs to meet with communities in advance of resettlement and allowed overburdened communities to declare a moratorium. However, using its influence in the state, Catholic Charities changed the law so that communities could only request a moratorium and the final decision was placed in the hands of the state refugee coordinator, a Catholic Charities employee.

VOLAGS are not the only guilty party, however. American big business wants the cheap labor and is willing to sacrifice American jobs, swell welfare rolls and risk national security in order to get it. The U.N. reported this September that only 50 percent of the migrants fleeing the Middle East were Syrians, most were young men, not families. The European Union claims that 80 percent are not Syrians.⁴⁶ Many are not refugees at all, but economic migrants. Last week Larry Bartlett assured Idahoans that the current crop of Syrians were not "economic migrants." He added however that we needed the labor, mentioning Tyson Foods in particular and repeating the mantra that these were jobs "Americans won't do."⁴⁷

It is apparent that the refugee program is out of control, and this is because VOLAGs have been incentivized with the promise of ever increasing dollars to resettle more and more refugees. It has become a literal industry, with the American taxpayer footing the bill. It is *not* an industry driven by compassion.

Resettlement is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. A much more humane, less costly and more effective way to help refugees is to give them assistance in place. Refugee camps are typically close to home, exist in countries or regions similar to home, with a common language and culture, and offer the promise of eventual repatriation when the problem at home is resolved.

⁴⁵ Robinson, Op. cit., 7.

⁴⁶ Ian Drury, "Four out of five migrants are NOT from Syria: EU figures expose the 'lie' that the majority of refugees are fleeing war zone," *Daily Mail*, September 18, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3240010/Number-refugees-arriving-Europe-soars-85-year-just-one-five-war-torn-Syria.html>.

⁴⁷ Davis, Op. cit.

One study has found that for every refugee resettled in Norway, for instance, 25 refugees could be helped in place in the Middle East.⁴⁸ It is a much more compassionate method of helping people than uprooting them permanently and resettling them here. The current refugee program needs to be overhauled completely, and the job of charity given back to legitimate charities, not government contractors motivated by profit.

⁴⁸ Mark Krikorian, "Just Say No to Refugee Resettlement," *National Review*, September 11, 2015, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/423883/just-say-no-refugee-resettlement-mark-krikorian>.



**Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) statement to Senate Judiciary Committee hearing,
“Oversight of the Administration’s FY2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications.”**

Thursday, October 1, 2015

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) was founded in 1979 to facilitate the relocation of Southeast Asian refugees into American society, and continues at present to advance the interests of these communities through advocacy, leadership development and capacity building.

Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese American communities arose from the largest refugee resettlement in U.S. history. Approximately 1.3 million refugees from war-torn countries in Southeast Asia were resettled into the United States after decades of the U.S. war in Vietnam, the Secret War in Laos, and the bombings of Cambodia, followed by the ruthless Khmer Rouge genocide. In 1975 alone, the United States resettled 4,600 refugees from Cambodia, 800 from Laos, and 125,000 from Vietnam, and continued to welcome hundreds of thousands more in need of safe haven in the years to come.

Syria is currently facing a similar humanitarian crisis, with more than 50 percent of its entire population displaced from their homes due to civil war and the growing threat of ISIS. More than 4 million refugees have fled the country, and an additional 8 million are internally displaced—76 percent of whom are women and children. Although SEARAC applauds Secretary Kerry’s recent announcement to increase refugee resettlement numbers to 85,000 in 2016, and 100,000 in 2017, these efforts still need to be drastically improved. At present, the United States has resettled less than 2,000 Syrians since the beginning of the conflict. In contrast, there are currently, 1.9 million registered refugees in Turkey, 1.1 million in Lebanon, 630,000 in Jordan, 250,000 in Iraq, and 130,000 in Egypt.

Growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment fuel the fire of fear and hate that penalizes millions of these refugees in need of protection. The current process of refugee screening in the United States subscribes to the most stringent of standards, allowing admission into the country only after successfully undergoing a rigorous 11-step process, which includes a number of security clearances. Despite this, xenophobia and islamophobia continue to steer the direction of public policy decisions, and weaken the country’s resolve in pursuing its humanitarian responsibility.

2015 marks the 40th year anniversary since the United States opened its doors to millions of men, women and children from Southeast Asia seeking humanitarian protection. Their courage and resilience has led these communities to grow and contribute to the country. SEARAC, along with more than 2.5 million Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans living in the country, stand with our refugee brothers and sisters from Syria, and call on the Administration and Congress to carry on America’s legacy as a leading humanitarian leader by opening its doors to vulnerable communities.

Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, pertaining to its hearing
Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program

Thursday, October 1, 2015

Mirna Barq, the President of the Syrian American Council, would like to submit this statement for the record:

Only one month ago we were heartbroken to see images of 3-year old Aylan al-Kurdi, a Syrian refugee, washed up on the shores of Turkey as his family tried to take the journey to Europe. The Syrian refugee crisis is the worst refugee crisis since World War II according to the United Nations with over 4 million refugees, and a total of 11 million displaced, which is over half of the Syrian population.

The Syrian American Council, the largest and oldest grassroots Syrian American community organization in the United States, calls upon the Congress to endorse a no-fly zone in Syria to allow civilians to return to their homes and prevent further killing and displacement in light of the current refugee crisis affecting the United States and Europe. We echo the calls of House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy who called for this very policy only three days ago.

As a devout Catholic, I know it is my duty as a Christians to stand with the suffering people of Syria. As is written in the Psalms: "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed." This is why we heard the Pope last month say that every single church should take in Syrian refugee families.

The Assad regime's relentless deliberate attacks against civilians since the start of the Syrian revolution in March 2011 continues to exacerbate the need for Syrians to feel their own country. The indiscriminate nature of the use of barrel bombs, chemical weapons and other weapons by Assad's air force has spawned a mass exodus of the country's religious and ethnic populations. A dictator who cloaks himself as the defender of Christians and other minorities daily rains down from the skies on their communities that have become displaced and destroyed.

Instead of just letting refugees in, we must more importantly focus on helping them stay in Syria and to return to their homes by offering them a safe place to live. The barrel bombs of the Assad regime are most responsible for displacing and killing Syrian civilians and last month they were used more than ever before.

The refugee problem cannot be resolved by treating the symptoms of refugees, but addressing the root cause of why millions of Syrians are fleeing outside of their country. Aerial bombardment by the Assad regime is the top killer of civilians in Syria. A no-fly zone would be an effective way to protect civilians from attack, provide essential protection for displaced Syrian civilians and offer a safe route for needed humanitarian supplies.

Such a zone would not end the conflict in Syria but it would lead to three key objectives in alleviating the refugee crisis: stem the outflow of Syrians seeking to escape the fighting; pave the way for allowing many refugees to return to their homes, and relieve pressure on neighboring countries struggling to cope with the exodus.



Statement for the Record Submitted By:

**Syrian American Medical Society
Syrian Community Network
Syria Relief and Development
Karam Foundation
Watan USA
Rahma Relief Foundation**

Submitted To:

Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest

Hearing On:

"Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implication"

October 1, 2015

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement on the important issue of the global refugee crisis and its implications.

We write to you as a group of non-political, Syrian American led humanitarian organizations that provide multi-sector relief inside of Syria, as well as assistance and services to Syrian refugees in regional host countries and in the United States. Our efforts together help millions of Syrians, both those who remain in Syria and those displaced as refugees. Our programs cover the full range of humanitarian sectors, including health, psychosocial support, community services, education, food and non-food items, protection, water/sanitation/hygiene, and women's empowerment. In addition to emergency relief, our organizations have established development projects that promote sustainable living and lay the groundwork for voluntary refugee return, such as building schools, facilitating jobs and skills training, and helping to establish bakeries and flour mills. Together, we support over 100 health facilities and almost 1,000 medical staff inside of Syria who operate under the principle of medical neutrality and risk their lives to save others. We further represent a large and widespread constituency of Syrian Americans throughout the United States, from Texas to New York to Michigan.

The viral picture of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old Syrian who drowned off of the shores on the Mediterranean, rightly shocked the conscience of the world this September. His death was a glimpse into the horror that countless Syrian refugees face in their attempts to find safety, hope, and peace from violence. Since the crisis in Syria began over four years ago, more than 10 million people have been displaced and driven from their homes. The surrounding countries of Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon have each taken in over one million Syrian refugees seeking protection. The enormous flow of refugees has created a strain on these countries in the region, which are forced to deal with extreme economic pressures, overcrowded hospitals, shortages of basic public services, and growing resentment among host communities. The sheer numbers of refugees and lack of support for host communities threaten their stability. Tens of thousands of Syrians are risking death again to flee to Europe; over 2,500 of them have drowned or disappeared in the Mediterranean in 2015. Unfortunately, when Syrian refugees manage to reach to Europe, they are often faced with brutality instead of acceptance. In Hungary, refugees are being caged in "holding camps" and have faced tear gas. In the Czech Republic, authorities are pulling refugees off of trains and numbering them with markers.

The U.S. has so far accepted around 1,500 Syrian refugees. This is in addition to providing over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid to the Syria crisis response. We commend the United States government for taking a leadership role in the crisis response and its work ensuring that vulnerable refugees are offered a glimpse of hope. **However, it is essential for the U.S. to take a leading role in Syrian refugee resettlement for the**

protection of Syria's vulnerable refugees, for the stability and security of the region, and for the relevance of the U.S. as a humanitarian and global leader.

Historically, the United States has always taken a leadership role in assisting vulnerable refugees fleeing major disasters. The U.S. has accepted the majority of all UNHCR referrals from around the world. In 2013, the U.S. reached its goal of resettling nearly 70,000 refugees from nearly 70 countries. Now, as the Syrian crisis has led to the largest number of refugees globally since World War II, we must assert our moral leadership and accept our fair share of Syrians, as well as push our European allies to open their borders to increased numbers of refugees.

Our Syrian American organizations have begun to work with local resettled Syrian refugees in the U.S., coordinating with volunteers, schools, refugee agencies, and civic and religious organizations to ensure that Syrian refugees are welcomed and assisted in their transition. Our built-in networks of Syrian American communities have been invaluable in these transitions. Federal agencies, particularly the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the Office of Refugee Resettlement, have been our close partners and allies. Together, we have created a useful public-private partnership for the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

The Syrian Community Network (SCN) is a prime example of a volunteer-led organization working closely with resettled Syrian families to ease their transition, focusing particularly on the Chicago area. The Syrian Community Network was established in 2014, and works to empower Syrian refugees in achieving a seamless transition and relocation in the U.S. by connecting them to services, resources, and support networks in their new community. These services include pro-bono legal help, assistance in finding English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and connecting university students to various institutions for scholarship opportunities. SCN has also been working with resettlement organizations, conducting workshops to educate resettlement case workers about Syrian cultural norms and practices, and educating Syrian American groups across the U.S. on the importance of organizing and supporting refugees as they resettle in their cities. They work with over a dozen Syrian families who have been resettled in the Chicago area.

There are many Syrian families and individuals who already stand out as success stories here in the United States. One Syrian woman, Fatima, came to the U.S. in February 2015 with her husband and two young children. Fatima lost her father and brother in Homs, Syria when her home was shelled by the Syrian regime. Fatima has excelled in her ESL classes in Chicago, quickly moving to level four reading. Her children are both excelling in their school work. Fatima has also had the opportunity to experience American civic engagement; she spoke at a press conference on September 16 about her family's journey, and she had the opportunity to sit down with Senator Dick Durbin at a meeting in Chicago and discuss how he could become a champion for resettlement of more refugees like herself.

It is essential that we allow more Syrians like Fatima into the United States. The families and individuals being considered for resettlement face dire protection challenges and

often need specialized care. Over 76 percent of Syrian refugees are women and children. Among those being considered for resettlement are victims of torture, women at risk, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ persons facing risk, women-headed households, and those facing acute security threats. Representative David Cicilline recently reiterated the message that resettling 100,000 refugees would increase the U.S. population by only .0003 percent, and that 69 percent of refugees in 2013 were self-sufficient after just 180 days in the country.

To the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, we recommend:

- **The resettlement of at least 100,000 Syrians by the end of FY16.** The U.S. should remain committed to being a global leader in this crisis, and should continue its proud tradition of offering refuge to those fleeing violence. This figure is in line with precedents set in recent history – the U.S. has resettled 750,000 Vietnamese, 1 million Cubans, and 350,000 Soviet Jews who fled during times of conflict. The resettlement of Syrian refugees should be in addition to, not instead of, resettling refugees from other countries. Therefore, we ask that the Presidential Determination be raised from 100,000 to 200,000 for FY16.
- **Congress work to further ensure sufficient staffing and capacity for security vetting agencies to increase their ability to conduct thorough and quick security checks.** We commend the meticulous and exemplary work of the Refugee Admissions Program, coordinated by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. All Syrian refugee profiles being actively considered for resettlement are reviewed thoroughly by the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program with support and leadership from the White House and security vetting agencies. These Syrians go through extensive security background checks, and those being considered for resettlement are among the most vulnerable populations. To prohibit Syrian refugees from the option of U.S. resettlement because of the presence of ISIL and other extremist groups in Syria, and not based on thorough U.S. led security checks and humanitarian needs assessments, discounts the commendable work of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State and amounts to blatant discrimination based on nationality.
- **Full funding of critical humanitarian and refugee assistance accounts for FY16.** In particular, we urge that the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account be funded at \$3.059 billion, and that the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account be funded at \$1.85 billion. It is critical to support accounts that provide protection and assistance for refugees overseas and those resettled in the U.S.
- **Enhanced regional support and renewed efforts to stem flow of refugees by addressing driver of refugee crisis – the lack of protection for civilians in Syria.** The U.S. must make immediate civilian protection in Syria and the pursuit of a sustainable political solution to the conflict in Syria its top diplomatic priorities. Until protection is available and the conflict is resolved, Syrian civilians will continue to be killed, displaced, or flee the country, and it will not be safe for them to return home.

It is critical that the U.S. take further steps to act as a leader in this unprecedented global refugee crisis. The U.S., founded as a nation of immigrants, must continue and scale up its support for vulnerable Syrian refugees, providing them with the hope of resettlement and a brighter future. Given the opportunity, Syrians, known for their entrepreneurial spirit, will very likely become the next American success story.



Written Statement for the Record

**Submitted by
The International Refugee Assistance Project**

**To
The Senate Judiciary Committee**

For the Hearing “Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal and Security Implications”

October 1, 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) organizes law students and lawyers to represent refugees and displaced persons who are fleeing persecution. Mobilizing direct legal aid and systemic policy advocacy, IRAP serves the world’s most persecuted individuals and empowers the next generation of human rights leaders.

IRAP is the first organization to provide comprehensive legal representation to refugees throughout the registration, protection, and resettlement processes. IRAP has successfully helped resettle more than 3,000 refugees in life-or-death situations, including Iraqis and Afghans at risk for their work with the U.S. military, children with medical emergencies, women who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence, religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTI individuals, and survivors of torture. IRAP is currently working on more than 500 cases. We have offices in Jordan and Lebanon, where our field staff conducts outreach to the most vulnerable refugee applicants. Our three offices help find cases that will be admissible to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) offices in this endeavor. We also have a legal hotline that has provided guidance to over 10,000 individuals seeking relief from persecution.

IRAP has chapters at 26 law schools in the United States and Canada. Chapters are student-initiated and directed, with guidance, training, and expertise from staff in IRAP’s New York office. Law students work in teams under the supervision of *pro bono* attorneys from over 60 private firms and in-house counsel at multinational corporations who are also guided and trained by IRAP staff. IRAP legal teams prepare refugee and visa applications, submit appeals, and advocate and empower our clients to successfully navigate the resettlement process. Together our *pro bono* network comprises over 1,000 legal representatives.

Safe Passage. New Beginnings.

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Because IRAP handles so many individual cases, our staff, law students, and lawyers have unique insight into refugee and visa processing. We utilize the knowledge gained from our individual cases to advocate for specific legal reforms to systems of refugee and Special Immigrant Visa processing in the United States.

The Administration has made some initial showings of support to the international community in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis: on September 10th, it committed to resettle a minimum of 10,000 additional Syrian refugees in FY16 and increase the total annual “ceiling” to 85,000 in FY 16 and 100,000 in FY 17. Many experts have responded that this target is insufficient in comparison to the scope of the crisis—the worst the world has seen since World War II. It is true that the Presidential Determination for refugee admissions remains critical to the U.S. resettlement efforts.

However, significant changes to the *underlying system* of refugee resettlement—to make it more expedient, accurate, and robust—are also needed to help protect and resettle Syrian refugees. Short of this, any promises of admissions numbers are empty. Currently the United States is denying or delaying Syrian refugees referred by the United Nations for resettlement at a higher rate than *any other nationality*, and admitting Syrian refugees at a rate about four times lower than other nationalities. Based on IRAP’s work in providing legal assistance to thousands of refugees throughout the Middle East—many displaced in the current crisis—we have identified the following problems and proposed policy solutions.

II. REFUGEE PIPELINE PROBLEMS AND PROPOSED POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. **Problem: The Syrian refugee crisis has stretched UNHCR beyond capacity, leaving UNHCR unable to identify and assist many of the most vulnerable refugees.** With more than 4 million Syrian refugees in countries of first asylum, and their call for funding less than half met, UNHCR needs help identifying especially vulnerable refugees who are in need of aid and protection. Domestic laws in Lebanon and Turkey bar UNHCR from registering new refugees as of May 2015, removing a vital opportunity for UNHCR to identify cases with serious needs. Throughout the Middle East, UNHCR lacks capacity to do home visits or affirmative outreach to particularly vulnerable refugees. Many refugees with urgent needs such as LGBTI individuals or survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (“SGBV”) will not identify themselves to UNHCR as such without relationship-building and outreach. People with chronic or serious medical conditions will physically not be able to leave their homes to approach UNHCR offices. NGOs located on the ground in countries of first asylum are in a unique position to identify refugees in need of services like emergency medical care, protection services, financial assistance, or referrals for resettlement.

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- a. **Solution:** Encourage UNHCR field offices to accept bundles of case referrals from on-the-ground NGOs. Designated community-based NGOs should receive capacity building and training to appropriately identify refugees to UNHCR who are most in need of assistance.
2. **Problem: UNHCR staff is currently unable to process the necessary number of refugee referrals to fill global resettlement quotas for Syrian refugees.** Prior to the increased pledges from the United States and the United Kingdom, UNHCR planned to make 126,677 refugee referrals in the next fiscal year, but according to its own estimate, its own staff is able to process only 56% of those resettlement referrals. NGOs are being asked to participate in a deployment scheme, contributing staff and resources to UNHCR's global resettlement efforts.¹
- a. **Solution:** UNHCR has already proposed a deployment scheme in recognition of how short it will fall from needed resettlement referrals. **The United States should ensure that the scheme, set to be implemented beginning in January 2016, comes to full fruition and results in high-quality staff and work product for efficient resettlement adjudications, and not simply a lower-cost model of operating.**
- b. **Solution: Permit NGOs to refer refugees in need of resettlement directly to the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and other resettlement destination countries.** NGOs are well-positioned to screen their referrals for specific criteria in light of complicated U.S. legal requirements for admission to the United States. DOS should provide necessary training to designated NGOs to allow them to refer cases directly to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. In addition to increasing referrals, this will decrease overall time for processing a single case.
- c. **Solution: Create a new Priority Two (P-2 or "direct access") program allowing Syrian nationals with approved immigrant visa petitions to enter the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program ("USRAP").** There are currently 7,244 Syrian immigrant visa cases, representing 20,730 individual beneficiaries, waiting for visa numbers to become available. These individuals already have demonstrated a family or employment-based connection to the United States and a desire to resettle to the United States. For many of them, a program enabling them to access the U.S. refugee admissions process directly, instead of first going through UNHCR, would speed their admission to the United States.
- d. **Solution: Modify the Priority Three (P-3) family reunification program to require that only the derivative have a refugee claim.** The P-3 family reunification program allows spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents of persons lawfully admitted to the United States as refugees or asylees to enter the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Prior to FY

¹ UNHCR Global Resettlement Needs 2015, 9, <http://www.unhcr.org/543408c4fda.html>.

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2004, P-3 was open to refugees with immediate relatives in the United States who entered in a variety of statuses. After FY 2004, P-3 was limited to refugees who were immediate relatives of individuals who entered as refugees or asylees. Currently, Syrian refugees who are parents of U.S. legal permanent residents cannot enter the United States until their children become U.S. citizens. Restoring the previous policy would allow parents of Syrians living in the United States to reunite with their loved ones on an expedited basis.

- 3. Problem: Background checks for USRAP take far too long.** In the best-case scenario, background checks alone take 18 months to 2 years to clear, according to DOS. Many cases take longer. This is clearly insufficient to provide meaningful assistance to refugees living in emergency situations, or to our Middle Eastern and European allies, who face influxes of thousands of people by the day. The result of this backlog is that the United States has admitted only 1 out of every 16 Syrian refugees referred by UNHCR for resettlement.

a. Solution: Improve the background check backlog at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Additional staff will be needed to clear DHS backlogs and accelerate individual background check times. This will require both adding additional and better-prepared security check personnel *and* utilizing existing tools and precedent. Hiring and onboarding security check personnel takes a long time (checkers require a high level of security clearance and major training). As such DOS and DHS need to be forward-looking and **start the hiring process now**. The new hires should have strong experience, including background working in the Middle East, enabling them to make accurate and efficient decisions in individual cases.

b. Solution: Ensure that available Terrorism Related Inadmissibility Grounds (“TRIG”) waivers are expeditiously implemented. The DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services section (“USCIS”) has implemented numerous waivers for TRIG inadmissibility grounds for cases in which individuals whose cases are caught up in TRIG laws, even though they clearly do not pose any threat to the United States—that is, they have not provided meaningful support to terrorist organizations. Individuals facing TRIG issues often face lengthy delays in adjudication of their cases. DOS can encourage its USCIS partners to apply these waivers expeditiously.

c. Solution: Provide increased oversight of, and resources to, USCIS to ensure that Controlled Application Review and Resolution Program (“CARRP”) holds, which can result in indefinite delays for individual resettlement applicants, be resolved as quickly as possible.

- 4. Problem: DHS Interviews do not occur at sufficient levels or in the most important countries.** Before entering the background check process, refugees must undergo

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overseas interviews, conducted by DHS USCIS officials who go on “circuit rides” throughout the world. However, there are often months or even years between circuit rides, and sometimes they are completely suspended due to security concerns. This means that the refugees in the most dangerous areas are often stalled in refugee processing.

For example, DHS suspended circuit rides to Iraq for about a year. These were just resumed, but there is a backlog of approximately 57,000 cases in Iraq alone. Many of the Syrian refugees are in Iraqi Kurdistan, but there has been no progress on conducting DHS interviews out of Erbil, which would present significantly fewer security problems. DHS has also suspended circuit rides to Lebanon for over a year (and just suspended one scheduled for fall 2015). This is in a country with a population of 4 million that hosts about 1 million Syrian refugees. If UNHCR refers a case to the United States in a country with no circuit rides, that case simply will not be processed.

- a. Solution: Increase the number of DHS circuit rides or implement a videoconferencing scheme for circuit rides.** A policy permitting for videoconference refugee interviews was announced by DHS to be ready to deploy in October 2014, but so far it has not been officially issued or implemented. This policy would enable DHS to conduct interviews even in those countries where security concerns may inhibit circuit rides. There is no reason to delay this life and cost saving policy change. We estimate that 2/3 of the cases referred by UNHCR are never even interviewed by DHS. **It is critical that DHS interviews begin again in Lebanon and Erbil.**

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Statement for the Record
Lavinia Limón, President and CEO,
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
Hearing on “Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications”

October 1, 2015

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer and honorable Subcommittee members, on behalf of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a national non-profit organization serving refugees and immigrants for over 100 years, I submit our testimony in support of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and to provide information on the fiscal and security aspects of the program.

Since 1911, USCRI has protected the rights and addressed the needs of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide and supported their transition to a dignified life. With a network of over 31 agencies and offices across the nation, we champion human rights and provide for the human needs of refugees.

Currently, 60 million refugees need help. The global refugee crisis requires strong leadership and the U.S. will inherently make a statement by our presence or absence. If smaller countries like Germany can help 800,000 refugees, I know America has the capacity to do more. We resettled 207,000 refugees in 1980, and I am certain we can do nearly that in 2016.

For refugees who are most vulnerable even after fleeing their countries, women at-risk, and complex medical cases, resettlement might be the only option. For refugees who have been in camps for decades, resettlement may be their only opportunity to leave a life of confinement in which they are deprived of basic human rights, like the right to work or to an education.

A Solutions-Based Approach

It has been our request since 2011 that the U.S. demonstrate leadership regarding the crisis in Syria. The U.S. should provide worldwide leadership in helping Syrian refugees and ensure we respond adequately and urgently by taking the following steps: (1) Increase the refugee admissions number for the U.S. in 2016 to 100,000 Syrians and 200,000 refugees overall; (2) Convene an international summit to find long-term solutions for the global refugee crisis as well as immediate solutions for Syrian refugees in Europe; and (3) Call on Gulf countries to provide financial support to Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan and to accept Syrian refugees for resettlement.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement Budget

I served as Director of ORR of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from 1993 to 2001. During my tenure at ORR, I was in charge of designing and implementing programs to assist newly arriving refugees to achieve self-sufficiency and become fully integrated members of their communities. Since my departure from ORR fifteen years ago, funding levels for the



Preventive Health, Social Services and Targeted Assistance programs have remained stagnant. These funding levels must be raised to keep up with inflation and the increasing and diversified mandate of ORR.

ORR was originally established to assist refugees resettled by the U.S. to obtain self-sufficiency. Today, ORR no longer only services refugees. Over the past three decades, Congress has expanded the mandate of vulnerable populations in the care of ORR to include: (1) survivors of torture and human trafficking, (2) unaccompanied children, (3) Cubans and Haitians, (4) Iraqi and Afghan interpreters who supported the U.S. military, (5) individuals granted asylum. We have a commitment to assist newly arrived refugees and other vulnerable populations, and (6) the United States Repatriation Program helping U.S. citizens and their dependents repatriated from overseas.

Congress should increase the ORR budget to meet the needs of an increased refugee admissions number for the U.S. in 2016 of 100,000 Syrians and 200,000 refugees overall. ORR resources enable states and local communities to welcome and support refugees, survivors of human trafficking and torture, and other vulnerable migrant populations on their path to self-sufficiency and integration.

Security Clearance Processes

Some Senators have publicly expressed their concern about the potential security risks resettling refugees from Syria may pose. However as someone who has helped the U.S. resettle refugees for many years, I know that DHS has significantly strengthened and enhanced its existing security check process for refugees in recent years. The process has never been stronger. All refugees who have been referred for resettlement to the U.S. are interviewed and approved for resettlement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Once a refugee is approved for resettlement, he or she will need to pass through a number of steps aimed at ensuring that the individual will not pose a security risk to the U.S.

The State Department runs the names of all refugees referred to the U.S. for resettlement through a standard CLASS (Consular Lookout and Support System) name check. Certain refugees undergo an additional security review called a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO). These cases require a positive SAO clearance from a number of U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to continue the resettlement process.

Refugees who meet the minimum age requirement have their fingerprints and photograph taken by a trained U.S. government employee, usually on the same day as their DHS interview. The fingerprints are then checked against various U.S. government databases and information on any matches is reviewed by DHS.

All refugee applicants are interviewed by an officer from DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). A trained officer will travel to the country of asylum to conduct a detailed, face-to-face interview with each refugee applicant being considered for resettlement.



Based on the information in the refugee's case file and on the interview, the DHS officer will determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee and is admissible under U.S. law. Under limited circumstances, refugee applicants may be interviewed in their home country rather than in a country of asylum.

If the USCIS officer finds that the individual qualifies as a refugee and meets other U.S. admission criteria, the officer will conditionally approve the refugee's application for resettlement and submit it to the U.S. Department of State (DOS) for final processing. Conditional approvals become final once the results of all security checks have been received and cleared. All refugee applicants approved for resettlement in the U.S. are required to undergo medical screening conducted by the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy. Prior to departure to the U.S., a second interagency check is conducted for most refugees to check for any new information. Refugees must clear this check in order to depart to the U.S.

Upon arrival at one of five U.S. airports designated as ports of entry for refugee admissions, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review the refugee documentation and conduct additional security checks to ensure that the arriving refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the U.S.¹

The Need to Act

As a nation of immigrants, we know better than most the importance of providing hope and opportunity to those fleeing persecution and expect our government to continue to demonstrate leadership on this issue. We cannot continue to stand by while innocent refugees are in need of life-saving protection. We renew our call for 100,000 Syrians to be resettled in the U.S. in FY16. We continue to work with our colleagues across the nation who are fielding calls from eager volunteers who want to help Syrians.

We welcome any questions or opportunity to meet to discuss the program further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ For a step-by-step overview of the resettlement process visit http://uscri.refugees.org/site/DocServer/Refugee_Security_Screening.pdf?docID=1521 and for a flowchart outlining the process visit http://uscri.refugees.org/site/DocServer/Refugee_Resettlement_Refugee_Journey.pdf?docID=1121.



Written Testimony of

**Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle, WA
Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration**

**For a Hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee's
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest**

**"Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program:
Fiscal and Security Implications**

**2:00 p.m., Thursday, October 1, 2015
Room 226 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

I am the Right Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp., Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, Washington, and Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM).

I would like to thank Chairman Jeffrey Sessions, Ranking Member Richard Durbin, and committee and subcommittee members for the opportunity to comment on the important issue of fiscally sound, safe and secure refugee resettlement.

Since its inception, the U.S. refugee program has enjoyed bi-partisan support as a life-saving, humanitarian program, a proud expression of U.S. values as a refugee and immigrant nation and as a world leader in addressing humanitarian crises. It has also been recognized as a good example of a fiscally responsible public private partnership that invests in America's future by building refugee newcomers' capacity of resilience and self-reliance, enabling refugees to support themselves and their families and give back to their new communities.

Regarding safety and security, before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, Congress has been vigilant about maintaining the safety and security of the U.S. resettlement program. This testimony will detail security bars to U.S. refugee protection, particularly those involving crime or terrorism. It will also detail how compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process by the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security. In the testimony, we will also show how fiscally sound, safe and secure resettlement fits in to the overall comprehensive humanitarian response to the world-wide refugee crisis, in general, and the Syrian crisis, in particular.

A delegation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM) travelled to the Syria region in October 2012 and completed a report titled, "Mission to the Middle East: A Report of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees." We also traveled to the region more recently and released a report in January 2015 entitled, "Refuge and Hope in the Time of ISIS: The Urgent Need for Protection, Humanitarian Support, and Durable Solutions in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece." Between 2012 and 2015, we have seen more than a sevenfold increase in the number of Syrian refugees fleeing to neighboring host countries. There were 550,000 Syrian refugees in the region when we first visited. That number is now over 4 million, with half of them being children and three quarters of them being women and children.

With the coming of ISIS we have also witnessed an enormous increase in the number of ethnic and religious minorities fleeing persecution. The conflict has also spread into Iraq, displacing some 3.2 million people in that country, as well, according to UNHCR. Mr. Chairman, I ask that the report of those trips be included in the hearing record. In this current statement, I will integrate and update our observations and recommendations from those reports.

When considering refugee situations, Catholics and all Christians are reminded that one of Jesus' first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees in the Middle East and faced some of the same fear, uncertainty, and dislocation that the millions of Syrians and Iraqis imperiled by this crisis face today. The situation is especially urgent given the unprecedented size, complexity, and rate of growth of the displaced population. The recent increased desperate and life-threatening flight of refugees with their families to Europe underscores that urgency.

Mr. Chairman, in my testimony today regarding the U.S. resettlement program USCCB/COM

recommends that the United States:

- Assure that U.S. resettlement is done in a fiscally sound, safe, secure, and timely manner.
- Resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees. We also urge all other resettlement nations to increase resettlement to locations outside the Syria region and thereby share the international refugee protection responsibility with neighboring host countries that are now taking on a disproportionate share of that responsibility.
- Resettle 100,000 other refugees in FY2016 and 100,000 in FY2017.
- Encourage the Department of State (DOS) to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minority ethnic and religious groups; and refugees in immediate danger.
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other nations to do likewise and thereby share the refugee protection responsibility with the host countries.

Further, Mr. Chairman, we recommend that resettlement be integrated into a comprehensive approach to the Syria crisis and urge that the United States:

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria and Iraq, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds an inclusive society in Syria and Iraq that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities, enabling them to return to their homeland in the future with safety and dignity.
- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.
- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time assure policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find protection and humanitarian care without improper rejection at the borders, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.
- Urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with DOS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), to expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from overly broad terrorism related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG) of U.S. immigration law.

I. Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church is a migrant and refugee church. The Catholic Church in the United States, for example, is made up of more than 58 ethnic groups from throughout the world, including Europe, the Middle East, the Near East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

We have a long history of involvement in refugee and child protection--both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and integrating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation as one that embraces ethnic diversity while sharing common values. The work of the USCCB's Committee on Migration is carried out by Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), which is the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency, resettling one million of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975. It is a national leader in caring for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children and works with over 100 Catholic Charities across the United States to welcome and serve refugees and unaccompanied refugee and migrant children.

The U.S. Catholic Church also relates closely with the Catholic Church in countries throughout the world, where our worldwide Catholic communion serves the needs of the most marginalized regardless of nationality, ethnicity, race, or religious affiliation. We serve many refugees, internally displaced persons, and refugee host nations straining under the large influx of people fleeing persecution and war. The Church's deep experience in combating poverty and forced migration and their root causes in the Middle East and throughout the world also includes the work of, among others, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official overseas relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic bishops, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), of which USCCB is the largest member, Caritas International, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA).

The Catholic Church's work of assisting all migrants everywhere stems from the belief that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the alien because of their own experience as aliens: "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament, the image of the migrant is seen in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own, and as noted above, a refugee fleeing to Egypt to avoid persecution and death (Mt. 2:15).

In modern times, popes over the last 100 years have developed the Church's teaching on migration, teaching that has been frequently applied by church leaders. Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, refugees, and migrants of every kind, affirming that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.¹

In our joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration*, January 23, 2003, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic bishops call for nations to work toward a "globalization of solidarity." "Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. No. 99. Also, "[b]ecause of their heightened vulnerability, unaccompanied minors require special consideration and care" No. 82.

¹ Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care of Migrants), September, 1952.

During his first papal trip, Pope Francis defended the rights of refugees and migrants, traveling to Lampedusa, Italy, to call for their protection. He decried the “globalization of indifference” and the “throwaway culture” that leads to the disregard of those fleeing persecution in order to seek refuge or a better life. Regarding Syrian refugees drowning at sea as they flee the crisis, he later exhorted the international community, “We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery!” He urged solidarity with refugees and cooperation among the nations to address this challenge.

In his recent trip to the United States in September Pope Francis further applied that important teaching, “Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions.... We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12).

II. Overview of the Worldwide Refugee Crisis and Syrian Refugee Crisis

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the world has hit an all-time high of nearly 60 million people forcibly displaced by war and persecution. Some 19.5 million of these forcibly displaced people are refugees. Half of the refugees are children. The growing number of displaced people and refugees across the world is caused by some 15 armed conflicts.

The Syrian conflict has created the largest number of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees. It deserves the full attention and mobilization of the international community. The armed conflict has continued to escalate across Syria and has spread into Iraq. It has brought ongoing large-scale destruction, human suffering, and death inside the country and threatens destabilization of the whole region. The size, scope, rapid growth and complexity of Syria’s forced migration are reasons for deep concern. With the brutal conflict and ever-growing forced migration, there is a serious lack of livelihood, shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and protection inside Syria and in neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

As is often the case in refugee situations, the protection, humanitarian support, and pursuit of durable solutions for Syrians is important for humanitarian reasons but also as part of a strategy for maintaining the stability of the host countries and the region. This requires burden sharing from the international community both through generous assistance to support refugees in the host countries and also by providing refuge outside of the region for some of those fleeing the crisis. Fiscally sound, safe and secure refugee resettlement plays a relatively small, but important, role in the overall strategy to address the Syria crisis and other refugee crises around the world. Before detailing the role of safe and secure resettlement, we want to describe the overall challenge that the Syria crisis presents to the international community.

The conflict has led to the forced displacement of some 50% of the Syrian population, including 7.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs), with some 12.2 million of all Syrians being in dire need of humanitarian help.² This constitutes a 30% increase in dire humanitarian need in one year and illustrates the deteriorating nature of this situation.

² Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #5, March 31, 2015, accessed May 19, 2015, at http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs05_03-31-2015.pdf

Over 4 million Syrian refugees have been forced to flee their country, with 1.1 million seeking refuge in Lebanon, 629,000 in Jordan, 1.9 million in Turkey, 248,000 in Iraq, 132,000 in Egypt, and some 428,000 who have fled to Europe seeking asylum. Besides the increase of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, those countries also host large refugee populations of non-Syrians, including, for example, some 200,000 Iraqis in Turkey, according to UNHCR.

One UNHCR official in Turkey explained to the USCCB/COM delegation the impact of the refugee arrivals there over the last four years, "It began as a migration emergency, became a protracted refugee situation, and is now a social crisis for our country." Almost 30% of Lebanon's population is made up of Syrian refugees; and some 10% of Jordan's population. Although very high, those numbers alone do not capture the challenge for host nations and communities. During the first two-days of USCCB/COM's most recent trip to Turkey, some 130,000 Syrian Kurds fled from ISIS in Kobane, Syria, into southern Turkey, where Turkey generously provided them protection and humanitarian care. Elsewhere, Lebanon reports that its recent 30% population growth from Syrians is equivalent to the nation's projected growth and expanded infrastructure needs for 2050. Or to use a local community example, in Aarsal, Lebanon, the city of 35,000 has already welcomed 39,000 Syrian refugees, including 20,000 in November 2013 alone.³

An enormous additional humanitarian and refugee protection challenge arises because over 80% of Syrian refugees in the region are so-called urban refugees who reside outside of camps, seeking refuge in widely dispersed local communities.

Some 75% of the Syrian refugees are women and children. Many, especially women and girls, face serious problems with gender-based and sexual violence in Syria and also often in the host countries. UNHCR reports that around half of the refugees are children, with 75% of them less than 12 years old.⁴ Some 60% do not attend school, including 80% in Lebanon and more than 50% in Jordan.⁵ Only 30% of Syrian, urban refugee children attends school in Turkey. This is due both to lack of education infrastructure and also because of widespread child labor—a strategy Syrian families have had to resort to for family survival. USCCB/COM also heard disturbing accounts of young girls being subjected to early marriage and bride selling as a means of survival.

The most vulnerable refugees are unaccompanied children. UNHCR has so far identified 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) among the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.⁶ The USCCB/COM delegation saw indications of many more than that during their recent trips. These are children alone in the world whose parents have died or who have been separated from their parents.

We turn last to the vulnerability of some Syrian minorities. While 75% of people in Syria⁷ and 90% of registered refugees fleeing from Syria are Sunni Muslims,⁸ there are also several ethnic and religious minority groups, including Christians, who are at risk as well. Christians make up some 10% of the Syrian population, totaling about 2.2 million.⁹ These are among the most ancient and

³ Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

⁴ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9.

⁵ Assistant Secretary Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

⁶ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9 (2440 URMs in Lebanon, 1320 in Jordan).

⁷ USCIRF, *Special Report Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

⁸ USCIRF, *Fact Sheet Syria: Syria's Refugee Crisis and its Implications*, July 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

⁹ USCIRF, *Special Report: Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

venerable Christian communities in the world that have a history of peaceful coexistence with their Muslim neighbors. They long to remain in Syria.

A growing number of ethnic and religious minorities from both Syria and Iraq are now fleeing as a result of ISIS violence. Besides the ethnic Kurds from Syria described above, the USCCB/COM delegation met many refugees during their trip who were fleeing religious persecution. Iraqi Christians had fled to Turkey from villages near Mosul, Iraq. They reported that they, as Christians, were given an ultimatum by ISIS to convert, pay a penalty for being Christian, or die. They understood the seriousness of the threat when the severed head of one of their noncompliant Christian neighbors was left on his doorstep. "I fled my country for Jesus Christ," explained one middle-aged man. "I left so I could freely follow Jesus." The delegation also met a young Syrian Christian convert seeking refuge in Bulgaria whose whole family had been killed after he explained to ISIS fighters why he had converted to Christianity. My fellow Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, rightly called religious persecution the "crisis within a crisis" in recent Senate testimony.¹⁰

III. Recommendations

We commend the peoples and governments of the refugee host countries for their generous welcome of their Syrian brothers and sisters. We commend the donor countries of humanitarian assistance led by the United States, UN agencies led by UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations, and other humanitarian actors. Yet with the escalating brutality of the conflict in Syria, the continued reports of crimes against humanity by the Syrian government and ISIS, and the thousands of Syrians fleeing for their lives every week, an even greater effort is needed. We urge a comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis that recognizes the important role that humanitarian interventions play in addressing the safety and security of the situation. As you will note, we urge a still modest, but much more significant, role for U.S. resettlement as part of the solution. Up to now, the United States has resettled only some 1,500 Syrians.

Mr. Chairman, we will provide details now of our three sets of recommendations for Congress—the first regarding fiscally sound, safe and secure resettlement, the second regarding the need for an inclusive peace in Syria, and the third regarding the need for taking a comprehensive approach by including sufficient humanitarian and development support for the refugees and host countries.

A. Increase U.S. refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees and encourage other resettlement nations to do so as well.

International refugee protection has three durable solutions to refugee situations: voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity back to one's home when peace comes, local integration into the host country, and safe and secure resettlement to a third country. In most refugee situations and in the case of Syria, voluntary repatriation is the most viable solution for the vast majority of refugees. To make this possible, the international community needs to support neighboring host countries to be able to safely and humanely host refugees until peace arrives. An inclusive peace in Syria and Iraq would enable all the refugees in neighboring countries, including refugees who are part of the Sunni majority and also ethnic and religious minorities, to be able to pursue voluntary return to

¹⁰ Testimony by Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops before the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations of the United States Senate, March 11, 2015.

their home countries. Such return is very important to most of the refugees. For example, for many Catholic and Christian leaders and Catholic and Christian communities forced to flee from Syria and Iraq, it would be a cherished opportunity to return and rebuild their ancient communities and maintain the vital and important role of Christianity in a region that is traditionally diverse both in ethnicity and religion.

For some refugees, with the permission of the host countries, they will be able to pursue the second durable solution and make a new life permanently in the neighboring host countries. For a very small percentage of the refugees, especially the most vulnerable and those most victimized and traumatized, the most viable and humane durable solution is resettlement to a location outside the region.

In addition to providing robust humanitarian support for refugees in host countries, the United States, a nation of immigrants and refugees, often demonstrates solidarity with refugees and host countries in far-away crises like Syria's by providing strategic refugee resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. It is strategic for the most vulnerable refugees because removing them from danger keeps their vulnerable situation from becoming catastrophic. It is strategic for host nations because it often removes vulnerable people who otherwise cause a disproportionate drain on the host's already strained resources. It is strategic for the overall crisis because it shares the burden and spurs other nations to act—either to provide aid or to agree to do resettlement or another durable solution. The U.S. generally resettles as many refugees as all other resettlement countries in the world combined. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the United States to make strategic use of resettlement for the most vulnerable Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

Among the most vulnerable in Syria and other refugee situations are unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) whose parents have died or who are separated from their parents. There is a great risk that many other URMs, as urban refugees, will not be identified at all and their needs will go unnoticed by the overwhelmed host government and international staff. There is a strong need for community-based systems to identify vulnerable, at-risk refugees, especially unaccompanied children, to screen them, to provide protection and care, and to prepare for resettlement or whatever durable solutions is in each child's best interest. URMs who are part of the Syria crisis and other URMs around the world should receive "best interest determinations" (BIDs) and ongoing support from social workers.

I must also call attention to religious minorities from Syria and Iraq as being among the most vulnerable refugees. As described earlier, it continues to be the hope and plan for many Catholic and Christian refugees to return home in the future. But for others, their vulnerability, trauma, and loss is such that the most viable and humane durable solution for them is resettlement outside the region. Other at-risk groups for whom resettlement is most viable include women and children at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs/media/companies; members of other minority persecuted groups, and refugees in immediate physical danger.

Mr. Chairman, before turning to recommendations regarding resettlement, we want to focus on maintaining the fiscal soundness, security and integrity of the refugee program, a goal that we share with this subcommittee. The U.S. resettlement program is a public-private partnership between the refugees and the local communities that welcome them. Refugees are granted a travel loan from the government, which they repay after they get a job. The local Catholic Charities of dioceses across the country and other community resettlement services work with thousands of volunteers

from churches and the community to help refugees build new lives. They help establish refugees and their families with jobs and enrollment in schools, English language classes, and in some cases counseling and care to heal from their traumas. Building resilience and self-reliance are the hallmarks of the refugee programs such as the Matching Grants program that help refugees find work, support themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities.

Before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, Congress has been vigilant about barring bad actors from U.S. asylum and refugee protection, particularly those involved in crime or terrorism. Among other bars, asylum or refugee protection in the United States cannot be granted to anyone who has persecuted others, been convicted of a particularly serious crime in the United States or a serious, nonpolitical crime in another country, engaged in terrorist activity, been a member of a terrorist organization, or otherwise posed a security threat to the United States.

Compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process.¹¹ Initially, most resettlement cases first involve a UNHCR refugee determination interview process that screens out individuals who have no grounds for refugee protection or who have committed heinous actions that fall under the exclusion clauses of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR (or sometimes the U.S. Embassy or a trained staff from a nongovernment organization) refers the refugee applicant to a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) overseen by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), where detailed biographical and personal information is gathered that will be used for in-person interviews by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and for security and background checks. DOS submits the names of all refugees through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS). Further security checks are done through U.S. interagency checks that have been conducted since 2010. If needed, a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) is submitted to U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies. When DHS arrives for in-person interviews, they take fingerprints and photos that are run through certain U.S. government data bases. If the person demonstrates grounds for asylum and no security problems, DHS grants a conditional approval, pending final security and medical screening. Prior to departure, another U.S. interagency security check is conducted. If the person passes, he/she travels to the United States where another check is done by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Port of Entry. If any of these checks reveal information that disqualify the person, that ends their ability to be admitted to the United States as a refugee.

At the point of applying for legal permanent residency another round of security and background checks is conducted for refugees. At the point of applying for U.S. citizenship another round is conducted. If above described security problems are revealed, they will bar the person from gaining the status they seek and subject the person to removal. As is clear from the arduous process, DOS and DHS have put in many layers of security to help assure the security and integrity of the program that both provides a new life to deserving refugees and assures the safety of the U.S. communities that welcoming them.

Despite Congress' best intentions, Republicans and Democrats alike have noted that certain U.S. security provisions create the unintended consequence of keeping certain deserving refugees from

¹¹"Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process," U.S. Committee for Immigrants and Refugees, accessed May 19, 2015, at <http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/Refugee%20resettlement%20-%20step%20by%20step%20USCRI.pdf>; "Bars & Security Screening in the Asylum & Refugee Process," Human Rights First, accessed May 19, 2015, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-Security-Safeguards.pdf>

securing resettlement in the United States. For U.S. resettlement of Syrians and Iraqis and for virtually any other refugee population that is fleeing an armed conflict, the set of overly broad U.S. immigration law provisions that bar entry to the United States, so-called TRIG (terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds). While having a laudable goal, TRIG provisions have been written and applied in such an overly broad way that they have delayed or barred admission of many deserving refugees who have no connection to terrorism.

Under the provisions, if a country has an armed, nongovernmental opposition group fighting against the government, that group is deemed to be involved in "terrorist activities." It does not matter if the opposition includes noble freedom fighters supported by the U.S. government to fight against a brutal regime that the U.S. condemns. If someone is a member, solicits funds or provides material support for the armed opposition group, or has a parent or spouse so involved, that person is barred from entering the United States. It does not matter if the person never violated any rules of war or criminal laws or has a neutral, nonmilitary role in the community such as providing humanitarian assistance or healthcare or retail sales. It does not matter that the person poses no danger or threat to our country.

In Syria's refugee crisis, there are armed opposition groups fighting against the Syrian government, a government that the UN has condemned for committing crimes against humanity. The opposition groups include some who have received nonmilitary aid from the U.S. government. Because of these and other aspects of the Syrian crisis, the overly broad and unfair application of the TRIG provisions pose a serious impediment for the resettlement of Syrians unless the Administration uses its exemption powers. These are measures painstakingly drawn up by a multi-agency, high level team from the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Justice. They are also meant to be carefully, judiciously applied during the resettlement screening process. DHS officials have told us that exemptions tailored to the Syrian crisis have been completed and are awaiting the final authorization.

Mr. Chairman, to facilitate the small, but important, role of resettlement in addressing the massive humanitarian refugee crisis caused by the Syrian conflict, we urge the United States to:

- Resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees.
- Resettle 100,000 other refugees in FY2016 and 100,000 in FY2017.
- Encourage DOS to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minorities, and refugees in immediate danger.
- Assure that the increased resettlement is done in a fiscally sound, safe, secure, and timely manner by:
 - Maintaining the rigorous security and background checks in the resettlement process while assuring that Congress appropriates and the Administration, through DHS and other security screening agencies, allocates sufficient resources and staff to increase the number people for whom security checks can be expeditiously conducted, thereby speeding up the process for refugees facing significant risks.

- Increasing the nongovernmental and community capacity to identify and screen the most vulnerable urban refugees in host countries, including URM, to meet their immediate protection and humanitarian needs, and to prepare for their durable solutions;
 - Increasing UNHCR's capacity for refugee status determination, resettlement, and BIDs; and for U.S. Resettlement Support Centers' refugee and URM processing capacity;
 - Facilitating Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) for the 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors identified in Jordan and Lebanon and for all URM identified in the region, and use BIDs to pursue their short-term protection and durable solutions;
 - Increasing DHS' capacity to do circuit rides to the region to interview Syrian and other refugees for potential resettlement; and
 - Allowing Syrians with noncurrent visa petitions to receive refugee interviews while maintaining the same strict security processing measures (this was one of the successful strategies to increase Iraqi resettlement).
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable, non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other resettlement nations to do the same, and thereby further share the burden with host countries.
 - Urge DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, to proactively and expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by fully authorizing the discretionary authority to grant exemptions from TRIG provisions of U.S. immigration law currently awaiting approval at DHS and by judiciously interpreting the meaning of the "material support" bar.

B. Pursue an inclusive peace in Syria.

While resettlement is the main focus of this hearing, it is very important to also recognize the other elements that contribute to a holistic response to the crisis. During a public appearance on August 25, 2013, Pope Francis denounced and called for an end to the "multiplication of massacres and atrocious acts" in Syria. Later, Pope Francis urged "the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of the entire Syrian people. May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries."

Mr. Chairman, we urge Congress to

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including majority populations as well as minorities ones, enabling them to return in the future with safety and dignity to their homeland.

C. Support host countries to maintain generous protection and humanitarian care for refugees, especially children.

Given the huge influx of refugees, international support and special vigilance are needed to maintain border and migration enforcement and asylum policies that safeguard refugee protection and related humanitarian care for Syrians and also for Iraqis, and other refugees, while also maintaining the safety and security of the refugee host countries.

Beyond maintaining protection at the border, there are enormous political and logistical challenges involved in protecting and serving the 80% of Syrians who are urban refugees. When refugees reside in camps, the international community generally partners with host nations to create the camps' infrastructure and service delivery system parallel to that of local communities, with refugees and communities remaining insulated from one another. With urban refugees, the international community partners with the host country and local communities to expand local infrastructure and services and facilitates face-to-face interactions, problem solving, conflict resolution, and collaboration between the local communities and refugees.

Lack of housing continues to be a chronic issue for Syrian urban refugees, most of whom were hard-working, middle-class people when they fled the conflict. Some fortunately still live with host families or friends. Others who lived in apartments—often 4-5 families per apartment—have already spent down what savings they had, and with few jobs, have insufficient money for rent. They, as well as new arrivals, are forced to find shelter in abandoned or unfinished buildings, or to create settlements of makeshift tents provided by NGOs. Many are also fleeing onward on dangerous maritime routes to seek refuge in Europe and beyond, with thousands losing their lives at sea.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the neighboring countries who host Syrian refugees, we urge Congress to

- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time refugee protection policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.
- Provide additional U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.



Statement of Andrea Cristina Mercado and Miriam Yeung, co-chairs of We Belong Together

Submitted to the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest

Hearing on "Oversight of the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program: Fiscal
and Security Implications"

October 1, 2015

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer and members of the Subcommittee, we are Andrea Cristina Mercado and Miriam Yeung, co-chairs of We Belong Together. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for inclusion in the record for today's hearing.

We Belong Together is a campaign co-anchored by the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum to mobilize women in support of common-sense immigration policies that will keep families together and empower women. We Belong Together was launched on Mother's Day in 2010 and has exposed the dangerous impact of immigration enforcement on women and families, advocated for comprehensive immigration reform legislation and campaigned President Obama to take executive action to improve the broken immigration system.

Women make up over half of all immigrants in our country today and it is estimated that there are over 5 million undocumented women in the U.S. Over the past year, tens of thousands of women and children have fled gender-based violence and gang recruitment in Central America and sought refuge in the U.S. Immigrant women who are community leaders, mothers, workers and survivors of gender-based violence continue to get ensnared in the over-funded and punishing immigration enforcement system.

Across the country, immigrant women who lead our campaign have looked to national, state and local officials for humane solutions that honor the dignity and human rights of migrants. Currently, Syria is experiencing a humanitarian crisis with 4 million refugees fleeing the country and 8 million internally displaced persons. Over 75% of these refugees are women and children and more than half are under the age of 18.

We urge the United States to act as a true global leader and offer protection to refugees and treat all migrants within our borders with fairness and dignity - this would include those seeking

protection at our borders as well as admitting refugees from Syria and around the world. This Subcommittee should ensure that growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment do not guide policy decisions - this would be un-American, inhumane and dishonorable to the dignity of migrants seeking safety and protection in the U.S.

The Global Refugee Crisis: A Unique Moment for American Leadership

Statement from Stephan Bauman, President, World Relief

In 1944, in response to the devastation and displacement of millions of refugees caused by World War II, the people of Park Street Church in Boston resolved to forego meals and send the money they would have spent on food to what they called the “War Relief Fund.” With other churches linked through the National Association of Evangelicals joined in the effort, they collectively raised \$600,000—in today’s dollars nearly \$8 million—to help rebuild Europe. Over time, as that sacrificial compassion extended to serve other regions plagued by poverty and conflict, the War Relief Fund became known as the War Relief Commission and, later, World Relief.

World Relief’s roots in the local church have remained central to our mission: throughout the world, we empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable. Today, as the world faces the most significant refugee crisis since World War II, with more than 50 million refugees and other forcibly displaced people worldwide, we are challenging, mobilizing, and equipping the Church to rise up in new ways to respond to this profound crisis.

In the United States, World Relief has partnered as a Voluntary Agency contracted by the U.S. State Department to resettle more than 250,000 refugees since the late 1970s, working in close collaboration with local churches as well as community organizations. At present, we operate refugee resettlement programs in 25 locations throughout the nation. This public-private partnership has been remarkably successful, leveraging the volunteerism and donations of community members to welcome and integrate refugees far more effectively than the government could on its own. In the midst of a global refugee crisis greater than at any time since our founding, we challenge the U.S. government to do more, and commit ourselves to assist in the integration of as many refugees as are admitted.

Standing with the Persecuted Church

Today, in various locations throughout the world, followers of Jesus are facing persecution because of their faith in Christ. In Syria and Iraq, historic Christian communities have been decimated by ISIS and other extremist groups, threatening the existence of Christianity in regions where it has been present since the days of the first apostles: many have been killed, others kidnapped, and many have fled.

Many of our brothers and sisters who have been forced to flee their homes have found temporary safety in neighboring countries such as Jordan, which now hosts over a million refugees from Syria alone, half of them children. In many cases, these refugees are ineligible to work and struggle to meet basic human needs. The Christian community in Jordan is not large, but local churches there are standing with persecuted brothers and sisters, partnering with World Relief to provide basic necessities and to establish “child friendly spaces” to holistically meet the trauma support needs of hundreds of refugee mothers and their children.

We also stand with the Persecuted Church through the U.S. refugee resettlement program. World Relief welcomes thousands of individuals each year who have been identified by the U.S. government as refugees—those who have fled a credible fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, political opinion, national origin, or social group—and helps them to integrate into American life.

Many of those we welcome are persecuted Christians: in the past five years, for example, around 40% of the approximately 320,000 refugees admitted by the U.S. government to the United States have identified with a

Christian tradition (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, etc.), more than of any other single religion. Many of those have been individuals who were particularly targeted because of their Christian faith: of 125,000 Iraqi refugees admitted since 2007, for example, more than 35% have been Christians, far greater than the percentage of the total Iraqi population that was Christian as of 2003.

As persecuted Christians seek refuge in our nation, how could we not welcome them in? Jesus Himself was a refugee, escaping Herod's genocidal tyranny and fleeing to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15). He tells us later, in one of the most explicit discussions of divine judgement in the gospels, that when we welcome a stranger who is among "the least of these my brothers and sisters," we welcome Christ himself. When we close our hearts against them, we do so to our Lord (Matt. 25:31-46).

World Relief is also urging the United States government to increase the number of refugees admitted in the upcoming year. At this unique moment in history when so many refugees globally have been forced to flee, and as U.S. allies in Europe and the Middle East have committed to taking in unprecedented numbers of those seeking refuge, we challenge the U.S. government to accept 200,000 refugees in the coming year, returning to the approximate number of refugees that the U.S. accepted in 1980. By doing so, the U.S. government through partnership with World Relief and other resettlement agencies, along with local churches, will have the opportunity to welcome many more of our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Serving All in Christ's Name

As Christians, we have a particular concern for the Persecuted Church, but our faith also compels us to respond with compassion to *all* those fleeing violence and persecution, regardless of their faith, both internationally and domestically.

We do so precisely because we are followers of Jesus, and we believe in the biblical teaching that each person is made in the Image of God and has inherent dignity and worth (Gen. 1:27). The Apostle Peter commands us to "show proper respect to *everyone*," not just to fellow Christians, and we can practice Jesus' "Golden Rule" by treating others as we would want to be treated if we were forced to flee our country, with compassion and respect (Matt. 7:12).

We are driven by Jesus' Great Commandment, to love God and to love our neighbor; Jesus' response to a legal scholar's question—what we know of as the Parable of the Good Samaritan—makes explicitly clear that our "neighbor" cannot be narrowly defined to include only those of our own religious or ethnic group (Luke 10:21-37). When anyone is in need—which includes a great number of both Muslims and religious minorities right now in the Middle East—our response must be to love them as our neighbors, with compassion and mercy.

To the contrary, if the response of the American church to non-Christian refugees is one of fear, misplaced suspicion, and hostility, we will effectively reinforce negative understandings of both Christianity and of the United States, while being unfaithful to the biblical commands to love our neighbor, to which we are bound regardless of their faith.

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

As passionate as we are at World Relief about the opportunity to welcome refugees to the United States as an expression of our faith, I am not naïve to the reality that this topic provokes fear in many Americans, including some Christians.

In our experience, having resettled hundreds of thousands of refugees of various religious traditions in partnership with local churches since the late 1970s, the vast majority of refugees are people of peace who are incredibly grateful to the United States for having received them when no other country would do so. They are, in most cases, the *victims* of terrorism and tyrannical governments: having lost their homes and, in many cases, friends and family members, they are the strongest opponents of extremism. While we have important theological differences with people of other religions, it is simply false, and slanderous, to imply that most people from other religious traditions are violent or intent on doing harm to the U.S. or to Christians.

As Christians, we must put into practice one of the most frequent commands of the Bible: “be not afraid.” Scripture tells us that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), and that must be our motivation. Those who give into fear—often based on rumors and false stereotypes—will miss an opportunity to reflect Christ’s love to individuals whom God loves, for whom we believe he sent his Son to die. By calling for limitations on the U.S. refugee resettlement program, they may also unintentionally be turning away persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

There has been much discussion nationally in recent months about “making America great again.” As Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan each noted, though, citing Alexis de Tocqueville, “America is great because she is good.” At various points in our nation’s history when faced with global refugee crises, the United States has proven its greatness by welcoming significant numbers of refugees, driven in large part by the faith commitments of many U.S. citizens. World Relief and the local churches whom we serve stand ready to welcome and integrate many more refugees once again, and we challenge our federal government to rise to this challenge by significantly increasing the numbers of refugees admitted in the coming year.